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The Inside Story On The Signing Of Kenshin Kawakami

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by Allison Shirreffs

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Hank Aaron:
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Design by Clark Odom

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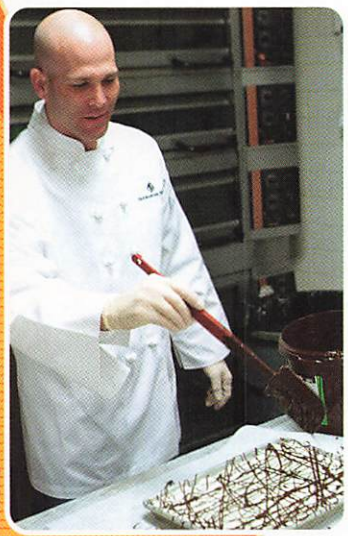

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ATLANTA BRAVES

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CHOPTALK USPS Periodicals Publication 022-732; ISSN 1555-1547 is published monthly for $37.95 per year ($56.95 Canada and Mexico; $76.95 other international; payment in U.S. dollars only) by Wonderdog Publishing, Inc.

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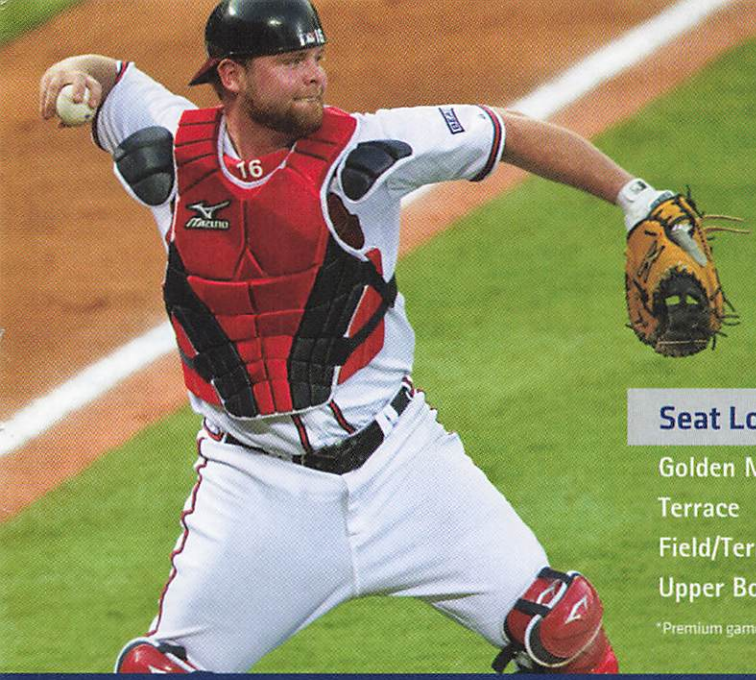
Office of publication is located at 12829 Trinity Dr., Stafford, Tex. 77477-4214. Visit Braves.com/ChopTalk. E-mail Letters@ChopTalkonline.com. This is the Official Monthly Magazine of the Atlanta Braves. Single copy price is $4.99. Periodical postage paid at Stafford, Tex., and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Please send address changes and returns to: ChopTalk, P.O. Box 80750, Conyers, Ga. 30013-8750.



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APRIL

		1	2	3 DET*	4 DET*
5 PHI	6	7 PHI	8 PHI	9	10 WAS	11 WAS
12 WAS	13	14 FLA	15 FLA	16 FLA	17 PIT	18 PIT
19 PIT	20 WAS	21 WAS	22 WAS	23	24 CIN	25 CIN
26 CIN	27 STL	28 STL	29 STL	30		

MAY

					1 HOU	2 HOU
3 HOU	4 NYM	5 NYM	6 FLA	7 FLA	8 PHI	9 PHI
10 PHI	11 NYM	12 NYM	13 NYM	14	15 ARI	16 ARI
17 ARI	18 COL	19 COL	20 COL	21 COL	22 TOR	23 TOR
24 TOR	25 SF	26 SF	27 SF	28 ARI	29 ARI	30 ARI
31 ARI						

JUNE

	1	2 CHI	3 CHI	4 CHI	5 MIL	6 MIL
7 MIL	8 PIT	9 PIT	10 PIT	11 PIT	12 BAL	13 BAL
14 BAL	15	16 CIN	17 CIN	18 CIN	19 BOS	20 BOS
21 BOS	22	23 NYY	24 NYY	25 NYY	26 BOS	27 BOS
28 BOS	29	30 PHI				

JULY

			1 PHI	2 PHI	3 WAS	4 WAS
5 WAS	6 CHI	7 CHI	8 CHI	9 COL	10 COL	11 COL
12 COL	13 ALL STAR GAME ST LOUIS	14	15	16 NYM	17 NYM	18 NYM
19 NYM	20 SF	21 SF	22 SF	23 SF	24 MIL	25 MIL
26 MIL	27	28 FLA	29 FLA	30 FLA	31 LAD	

AUGUST

						1 LAD
2 LAD	3 SD	4 SD	5 SD	6 LAD	7 LAD	8 LAD
9 LAD	10	11 WAS	12 WAS	13	14 PHI	15 PHI
16 PHI	17	18 NYM	19 NYM	20 NYM	21 FLA	22 FLA
23 FLA	24	25 SD	26 SD	27 SD	28 PHI	29 PHI
30 PHI	31 FLA					

SEPT/OCT

		1 FLA	2 FLA	3 FLA	4 CIN	5 CIN
6 CIN	7	8 HOU	9 HOU	10 HOU	11 STL	12 STL
13 STL	14	15 NYM	16 NYM	17 NYM	18 PHI	19 PHI
20 PHI	21 NYM	22 NYM	23 NYM	24	25 WAS	26 WAS
27 WAS	28 FLA	29 FLA	30 FLA	1 WAS	2 WAS	3 WAS
4 WAS						

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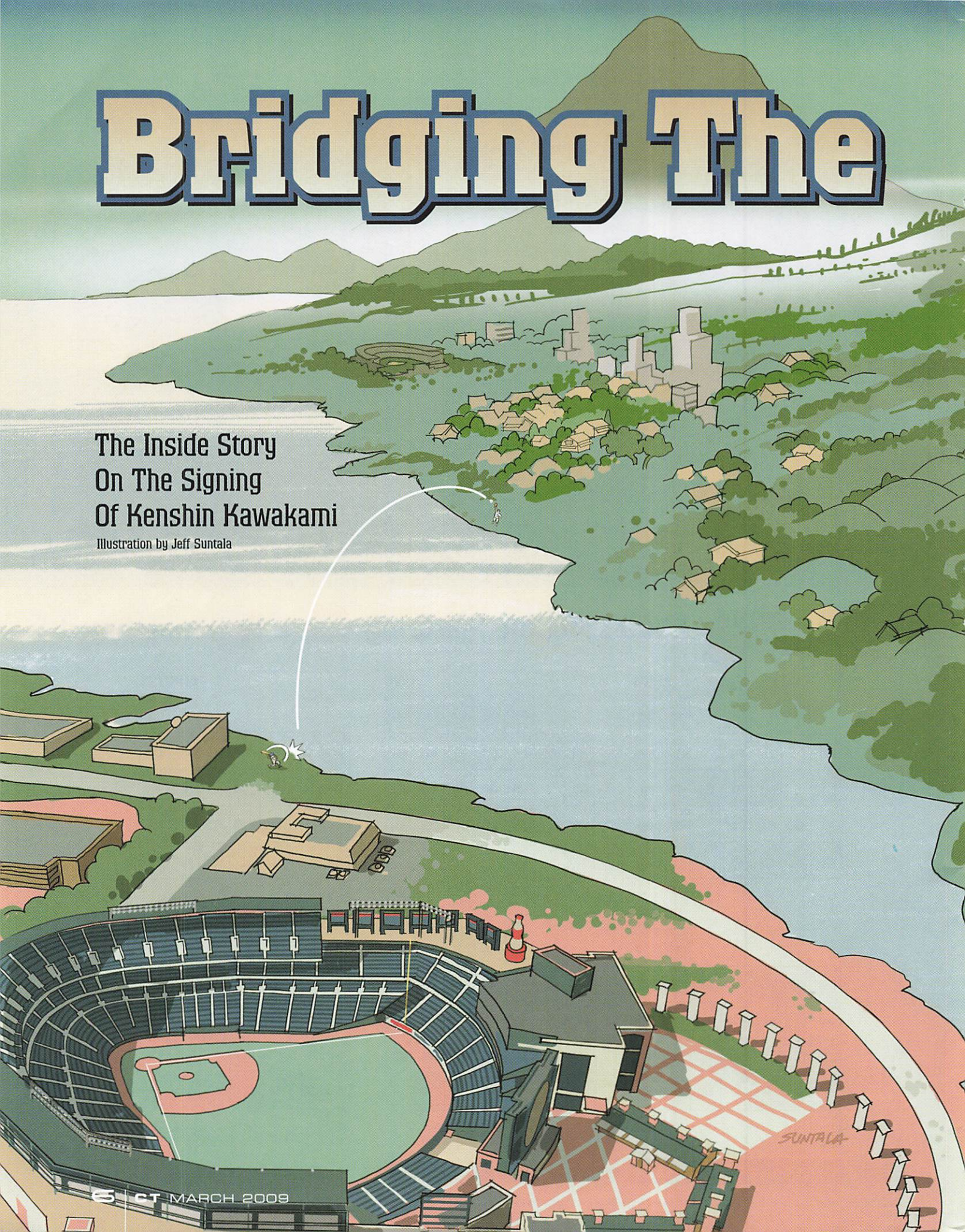
Bridging The

The Inside Story On The Signing Of Kenshin Kawakami

Illustration by Jeff Suntala



Gap To Japan

BY CLINT WILLIAMS

There at the world's largest drive-in, perched above Atlanta's clogged Downtown Connector, amid the fried food fragrance and chaotic chorus, "What'llyahave What'llyahaveWhat'llyahaveWhat'llyahave," the stranger in a strange city felt at ease.

It would be a stretch to say a visit to The Varsity Downtown — no matter how good the chili dogs — convinced Kenshin Kawakami to sign with the Braves. But the food and the friendly fans Kawakami met there reaffirmed his decision to leave the security of a successful career in his homeland of Japan to sign a three-year contract to pitch nearly 7,000 miles away in Atlanta.

"Later on, he admitted the Varsity visit made him feel better about the entire Atlanta experience," said Dan Evans, president/CEO of West Coast Sports Management, the firm representing the right-handed pitcher.

Years of diligent homework by the Braves preceded the signing of the first Japanese-born player in franchise history.

"Over the course of the last two years," said general manager Frank Wren, "we've tried to intensify our scouting efforts in Japan.

"We felt the quality of the players coming from Japan was getting better, and we wanted to be prepared when a player became available that would fit on our team," he said.

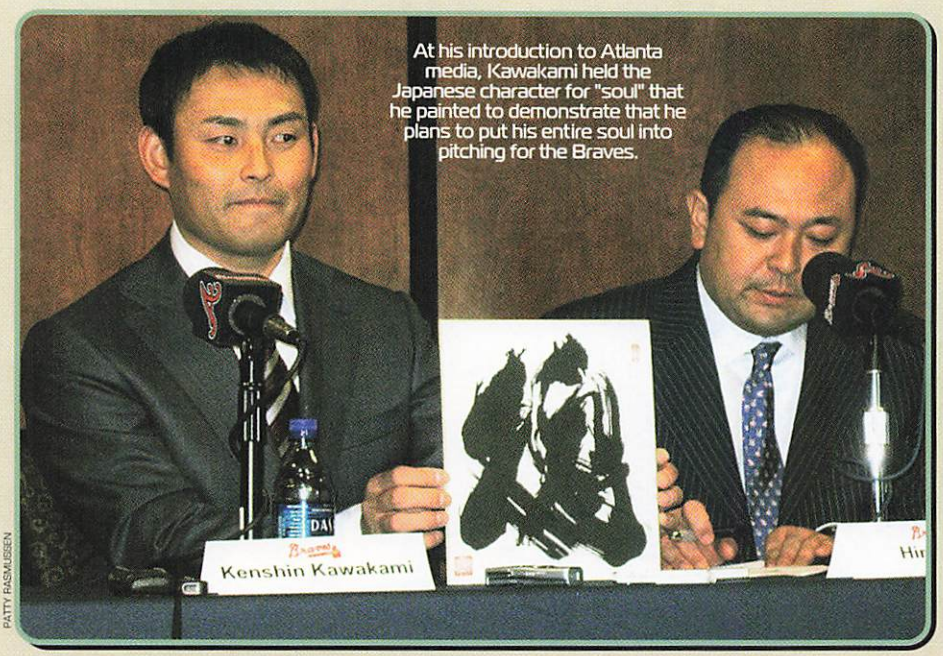
But before bringing Japanese players to Atlanta, Braves management wanted to make sure the players would be happy once they got there. A lunch two years ago with the Japanese consul general convinced Braves officials the Japanese community was large enough to support players living in Atlanta, Wren said.

There are about 8,000 Japanese nationals registered with the consulate living in Georgia, most of them in the Atlanta area, said current consul general Takuji Hanatani.

There are more than 350 Japanese companies in Georgia and a large continent of Japanese executives, physicians, attorneys and other professionals living in Buckhead, Duluth, Alpharetta and Peachtree City, said Hanatani.

Asian groceries along Buford Highway in the northeast sector stock many Japanese staples.

"The Japanese community here feels very comfortable in Atlanta," Hanatani said.



At his introduction to Atlanta media, Kawakami held the Japanese character for "soul" that he painted to demonstrate that he plans to put his entire soul into pitching for the Braves.

PATTY RASMUSSEN

Kawakami pitches with a lot of enthusiasm and fighting spirit.

HARRY HOW/GETTY IMAGES

"Kawakami will not be homesick," the consul general added with a smile.

Kawakami arrived in Georgia with an impressive resume that includes Rookie of the Year and Most Valuable Player awards in his homeland. And there was a no-hitter in 2002, too.

Kawakami spent 11 seasons with the Chunichi Dragons of Japan's Central League, who made him the team's top draft pick in 1998. Kawakami went on to become the league's Rookie of the Year that season, and in 2004 earned the league's MVP Award, when he went 17-7 with a 3.32 ERA, 176 strikeouts and just 38 walks in more than 190 innings.

In that MVP year, Kawakami also won the Sawamura Award, which is Japan's equivalent of the Cy Young Award.

And — shades of Greg Maddux — Kawakami is also recognized as an excellent fielder, winning three Gold Glove awards.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Hampered by a bad back for several weeks, Kawakami last season went 9-5 with a 2.30 ERA.

Over the course of his career in Japan, Kawakami pitched 257 games, posting a 112-72 (.609) record with a 3.22 ERA. He notched 1,328 strikeouts and allowed just 351 walks in more than 1,600 innings for the Dragons.

Beyond the numbers — and a cutter and a big, slow curveball — Kawakami has the attitude to be successful in the majors, Braves officials said.

"I've always enjoyed his fighting spirit on the mound," said Phil Dale, who scouted Kawakami as the Braves' Eastern Rim coordinator.

Kawakami is more animated on the mound than most Japanese pitchers, experts say.

"He plays with a lot of enthusiasm," Dale said.

"I have been able to see him from the opposing dugout while I have been a pitching coach for the Australian World Classic team," Dale continued, "And he always put on a solid display. To me, he was one of the toughest competitors to come up against on the Japanese team."

The competition to sign Kawakami was tough, too. Evans said his firm started talking to all 30 major league teams shortly after agreeing to represent Kawakami in November. From the beginning, Evans said, the Braves' pitch was distinguished by its attention to detail.

"What was really unique," Evans said from California in a telephone interview, "was the depth of research related to the off-the-field situations Kawakami would encounter."

During an hour-long conversation in his hotel suite at the winter meetings in Las Vegas in early December, Wren said he briefed Evans about the businesses, restaurants and neighborhoods that comprise the Atlanta area Japanese community. The packet Wren passed to Evans included a list of the non-stop flights between Tokyo and Atlanta.

But it wasn't just boilerplate facts and figures about Atlanta. The information was tailored to address Kawakami's interests and values, Evans said.

"Frank did his homework. The Braves knew what was important to Kenshin Kawakami," the agent said.

The Braves' initial offer also assigned Kawakami the uniform number 11 — the pitcher's number throughout his Japanese professional career.

"It was a sign of tremendous respect for a guy who had played with the Dragons but hadn't played the American game," Evans said.

That attention to detail went beyond the ballpark.

"For example, Kenshin is a tremendous golfer and loves to play," Evans said. The Braves' sales pitch included information and photographs of golf courses near Disney World, where the Braves hold spring training, and in Atlanta and other National League cities.

It was evident the Braves organization

SECOND SIGNING

The Braves signed 18-year-old Japanese pitcher Yoshinori Yamarin to a minor league contract Jan. 26, less than two weeks after they announced the signing of Kenshin Kawakami.

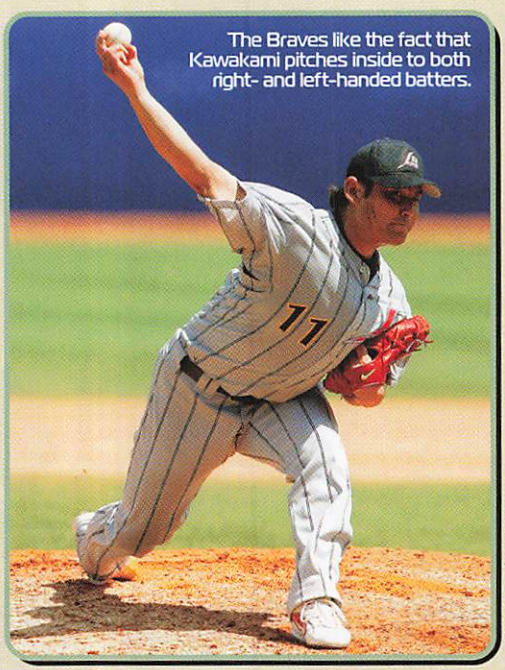
Yamarin's fastball has been clocked as high as 92 mph, and scouts believe he projects well at 6-foot-1 and 187 pounds. He is expected to begin his professional career by reporting to the Braves' instructional league in Australia after he graduates from Nissei Gakuen Daisan High School in Hygo Prefecture in June.

The Braves announced the signing and introduced Yamarin at a press conference in Osaka, where the pitcher - wearing a Braves jersey - said he has lofty goals.

"I want to become the kind of pitcher who can throw alongside [Kenshin] Kawakami," said Yamarin at the press conference. "I always feel like I want to be the best at whatever I do, and I wanted to play baseball where the sport was born."

PATTY PASMUSSEN

Kawakami meets his new pitching coach, Roger McDowell, at Turner Field.



The Braves like the fact that Kawakami pitches inside to both right- and left-handed batters.

MARY HOLLETZEK MYERS

would do whatever it took to smooth the transition and ease the culture shock of playing on another continent, Evans said.

After that first meeting in Las Vegas, Wren said, "We continued talking for the next three weeks to finish the deal."

Osaka-based Braves scout Hiroyuki Oya accompanied Kawakami to and from Atlanta. The Braves are scouting the housing market for Kawakami and will have an interpreter meet him at the Orlando airport when he reports for spring training.

"We will be hiring a translator to be with KK while he is in the United States," Wren said.

Such efforts to make life away from the ballpark easier remove barriers to success on the mound, Evans said.

The Braves, Evans said, see Kawakami as a long-term investment to pave the way for recruiting top-notch Japanese talent, which proved true shortly after Kawakami's signing when the Braves also signed 18-year-old pitcher Yoshinori Yamarin (see sidebar, page 8).

And the efforts by the Braves showed something more, Evans said.

"They cared about him as a person, not just as a player."

Kawakami's teammates on the Chunichi Dragons mob him after his no-hit, 6-0, victory against the Tokyo Giants in 2002.

AFP PHOTOS

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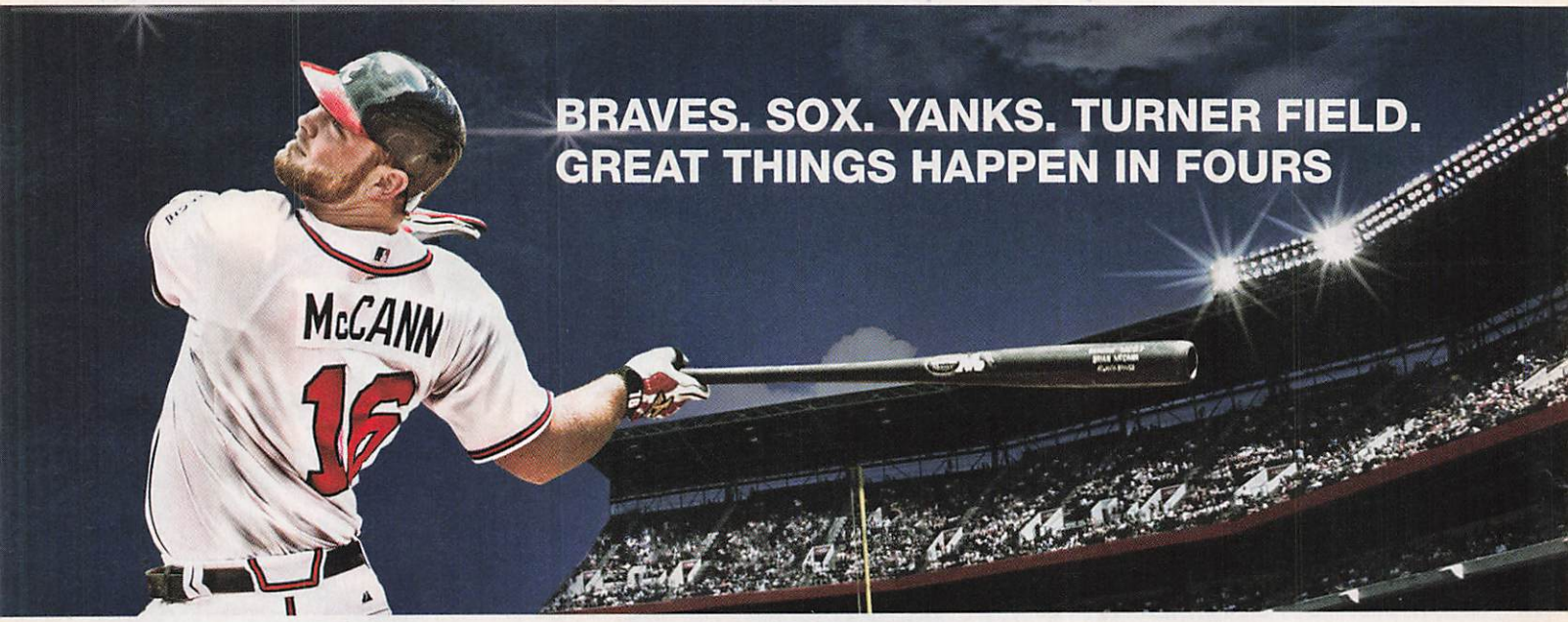

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WED	8/12	WASHINGTON NATIONALS	7:10
WED	8/26	SAN DIEGO PADRES	7:10

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SAT	9/5	CINCINNATI REDS	7:10

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PAINTING THE CORNERS

BY JAY BUSBEE

SPRINGING FORWARD WITH '08 LESSONS

IF YOU'RE LIKE ME, every day that puts us farther away from the 2008 season is a good day. Seventy-two wins… remember the days when the Braves used to hit that mark in August? Ah, well – what's done is done.

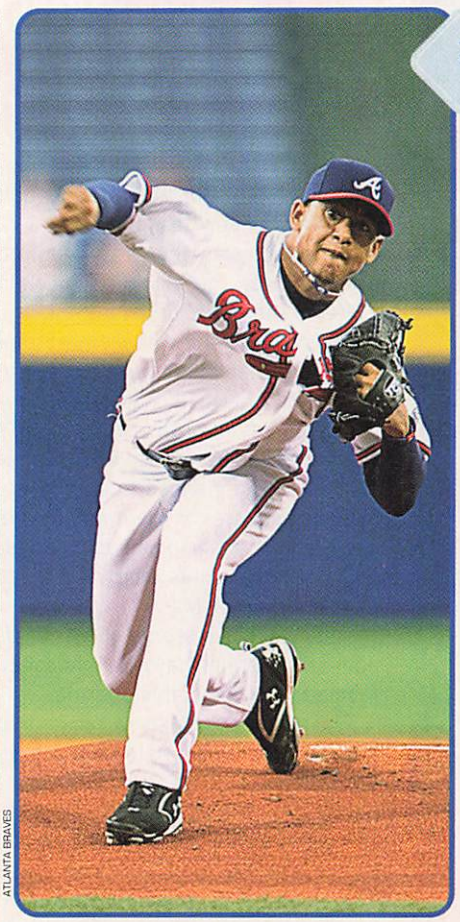
But let's not throw out 2008 completely. No, as difficult as last season was, we can still take some good from it. With any luck, and some better breaks than last year, 2008 will stand as a transitional season – the year we said goodbye to some old legends and welcomed some new ones.

Rise of the young arms: Rookie Jair Jurrjens led the Braves in wins at age 22. (Yes, that team-leading total was an '80s-esque 13 wins, but let's not focus on that.) Last year saw three of the best pitchers ever to wear a Braves uniform – John Smoltz, Tom Glavine and Tim Hudson - go down with season-ending injuries. In response, the Braves turned to pitchers who were in grade school when Smoltz faced Jack Morris in the 1991 World Series. Jo-Jo Reyes and Charlie Morton were two of those "youngsters," who along with up-and-coming Tommy Hanson may someday form the core of a young pitching staff that could develop into something special. Sound familiar?

Francoeur's falloff: No Brave more embodied the frustration of 2008 than Jeff Francoeur, whose production at the plate took a nosedive. Never the most patient of hitters, Francoeur looked – and, by his own admission, felt – completely out of place at bat. For a guy who's never suffered any kind of athletic adversity in his life, 2008 was a bucket of ice water to the face.

We won't know until April, but so far he's saying all the right things, and he's shown up to pre-season workouts far leaner than he was last year. Perhaps a little adversity is good for the soul… and for rightfielders.

Solid up the middle: 2008 demonstrated that the Braves have three strong middle infielders in Yunel Escobar, Kelly Johnson and Martin Prado. Of course, if my math is correct, there are only two middle-infield positions, which means Atlanta's looking at a surplus of good ballplayers. Unlike their outfield counterparts, the infield put up solid numbers across the board. In the case of the three middlemen, they give Bobby Cox plenty of options and the type of "problem" that teams like to have.



ATLANTA BRAVES

Jair Jurrjens led the staff in wins, starts, innings and strikeouts last year and figures to be a key member of a vastly improved rotation this season.

Quick fixes don't always fix anything: The Braves cashed in a good chunk of their short-term future in 2007 when they dealt a pile of prospects for Mark Teixeira. While Tex played well for the Braves, he didn't put the team on his back and carry it to the playoffs. Trading him at mid-season was an acknowledgement that the experiment in dining at the superstar buffet didn't work as well as it did in, say, 1993 with Fred McGriff. And declining San Diego's demands for some of Atlanta's most valuable rookies in exchange for Jake Peavy indicates that the Braves learned something from the Teixeira affair.

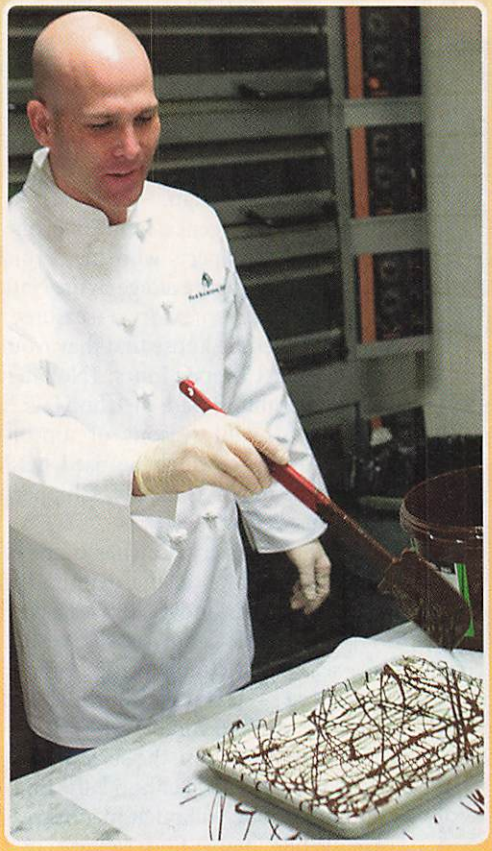
Chipper's resurgence: If, in 2006, one had asked baseball experts who they'd pick to be the best hitter for average in the National League over the next two seasons, you could have bet the house that they wouldn't have chosen Chipper Jones. (Not that we endorse gambling here at ChopTalk.) But after two straight seasons of top-of-the-league hitting in which he used his head every bit as much as his bat, Chipper is as dangerous as ever.

McCann's mastery: Catcher is one of the toughest positions on the diamond to fill for the long term, and the Braves have done just that with McCann. An All-Star his first three seasons, McCann will be one of the cornerstones – literal and spiritual – of the Braves for years to come.

The end of one run, the start of another? Last year was, in all likelihood, the final season John Smoltz will pitch in a Braves uniform. While many find sadness in that, there's also a certain break with the past that comes with cutting ties with your longest-tenured player. As long as Smoltz was on the team, the comparisons to the playoff dynasty were right at the top of everyone's mind. Making the break with Smoltz was painful, like seeing him in a Boston uniform will be. But it's been three years since Atlanta made the playoffs, and it's time for this crew to get out from under the legacy of 1991-2005.

> "IT'S BEEN THREE YEARS SINCE ATLANTA MADE THE PLAYOFFS, AND IT'S TIME FOR THIS CREW TO GET OUT FROM UNDER THE LEGACY OF 1991-2005."

True, expecting one year to go well just because the previous one was so horrible isn't necessarily the best way to predict a season. But at this point in the pre-season, it's all about hope – and the possibility that if everything breaks right, the season won't end until late October. Hey, it's happened before.



SPECIAL

Pastry chef Tim Hudson drizzles chocolate glaze on his "chocolate mint squares" that are a big hit at the Park 75 Restaurant at Atlanta's Four Seasons Hotel.

HUDDY & THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY

AS A PITCHER, Tim Hudson usually bats ninth. But he batted leadoff at Atlanta's Four Seasons Hotel Jan. 30 when he was the first "featured celebrity" for the weekly Chocolate Buffet at the Park 75 Restaurant.

Guests enjoying "chocolate mint squares" at the buffet have Hudson to thank. The tasty mint chocolate brownie also hit a home run with the hotel's executive pastry chef, Christopher Jennings, who planned to add chocolate mint squares to the menu for the remaining 15 evening buffets on Friday and Saturday nights from 9 p.m. to midnight through Mar. 27.

Each week a celebrity guest "chef" adds his or her favorite chocolate recipe to the delectable offerings.

"We were looking for a recipe that was not just a chocolate chip cookie. We wanted something a little more challenging," said Hudson's wife, Kim. "My sister-in-law, Linda Bruner, made these squares at Christmas time. They're sort of part cookie/part brownie with a peppermint layer and a chocolate glaze."

Tim didn't actually make the squares, but he drizzled the chocolate glaze over them. Then, wearing his chef's coat, he was on hand to watch hungry customers gobble up "his" creation.

In addition to Hudson's Chocolate Mint Squares, the Jan. 30 buffet featured chocolate brulee topped with fresh berries, Grand Marnier pate dusted with confectioner's sugar, chocolate crunch cake, chocolate mousse with berries, a chocolate fountain with fresh fruit, cream puffs and Rice Krispies treats for dipping, hot chocolate flavored with star anise, and many more decadent treats for a mere $20 per person.

The Hudsons enjoyed their evening at Park 75, dining with friends Bob and Marci Manning, Ryan and Angel Casterline, Stephanie Clarke, and Braves pitcher Anthony Lerew. The verdict on the chocolate mint squares was unanimous: "Delicious!"

- PATTY RASMUSSEN

GOLDEN OLDIE

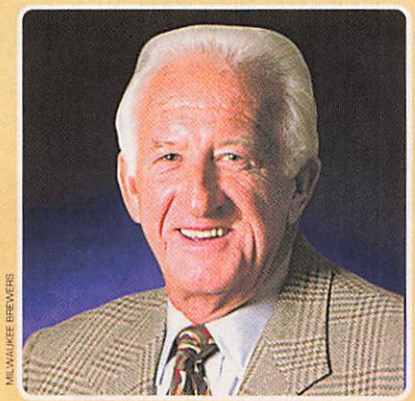
WHEN IT COMES TO PITCHING, few did it better than Greg Maddux. His 355 career victories rank eighth all-time. And when it comes to fielding his position, no one ever did it better than Maddux. You can look it up.

The 42-year-old Maddux, who announced his retirement in December and certainly will be entering the Hall of Fame as a Brave in 2014, picked up a pair of awards, including his record 18th Rawlings Gold Glove, at the 86th annual Baseball Writers' Association of America's annual New York Chapter awards dinner in Manhattan Jan. 25. No one else at any position has ever won that many Gold Gloves for fielding excellence since the award was instituted in 1957. Jim Kaat (R), who is runnerup to Maddux with 16, presented the trophy to the former Braves righthander (1993-2003).

Maddux also received the William J. Slocum-Jack Lang Award for long and meritorious service from the BBWAA.

NY CHAPTER, BBWAA

DINNER & A JOKE



MILWAUKEE BREWERS

THE MILWAUKEE Braves Historical Association will honor former Braves catcher Bob Uecker (1962-63, '67) at a May 11 banquet at Potawatomi's Northern Lights Theater in Milwaukee.

Suffice to say Uecker will not be honored for his playing career (.200 career batting average in six seasons), but for his 38 years as a Brewers broadcaster and his many accomplishments as a comedian and actor.

His wry humor, often about his playing ability, led to quite a career that included 64 appearances on the Tonight Show with Johnny Carson. He is well known for his long-running role in the sitcom Mr. Belvedere and also a part in the movie Major League. Uecker is a member of the National Radio Hall of Fame and won the 2003 Ford Frick Award. Tickets for the banquet are $125 apiece. Visit 57braves.com.

HOW DO THEY DO THAT?

TEST AND TRAIN PLAYERS' EYES

Dr. Bill Harrison (R) and John Schuerholz (L) have been working together since 1972 when Schuerholz was with the Kansas City Royals.

WITH JUST A SPLIT SECOND to decide whether to swing at a 95 miles per hour fastball, sharp eyesight is essential for major league hitters.

During spring training, Dr. Bill Harrison examines the eyes of Braves players. He also conducts programs to help them train their eyes to use them better.

"We have portable equipment we take into the Braves' training room," said Harrison, an optometrist who has evaluated the team's players since 1991. "We don't address eye health. We address baseball vision-related skills."

Harrison assesses visual skills like contrast sensitivity - the ability to see objects when the contrast is not bright - which helps track a pitched baseball. He believes that players, through use of a training program he developed for baseball, can improve their visual skills.

Matt Diaz, for example, worked on his binocularity - the ability to use both eyes together to enhance depth perception and make better use of the eye muscles.

Harrison also evaluates stereo acuity, which is high-level depth perception. Stereo acuity reveals how well the two eyes and both sides of the brain work together. He's found that players with high stereo acuity can come off the bench and adjust quickly to pitching.

Former Brave Andruw Jones had the best eyesight of any Atlanta player Harrison has examined. David Justice and Terry Pendleton both had exceptional vision, as well. Harrison believes Chipper Jones possesses an unbelievable ability to focus, which enables him to make the most of his vision.

- STEVE FALL

CHANGE OF PLANS

HANK AARON 75TH BIRTHDAY 2009 HANK AARON STADIUM MOBILE, AL

THE 75TH BIRTHDAY gala for Hank Aaron set for Feb. 12 in his hometown of Mobile, Ala, was postponed until April 7 due to a scheduling conflict with another civic event. The banquet, which Aaron will attend, starts at 7 p.m. (Central) at the Arthur Outlaw Recreation Center and is preceded by a silent auction beginning at 5:30. Tickets are $75 each and are available at hankaaronstadium.com or at the Hank Aaron Stadium ticket office or by calling (251) 479-2327.

On April 8, the 35th anniversary of Aaron hitting home run No. 715 to break Babe Ruth's (OF, 1935) record, Aaron will participate in a preview of the work being done to convert his childhood home into a museum in Mobile's Gas Light Park. Proceeds from the birthday gala will be used to help fund the renovation and operation of the museum.

DISNEY

Jeff Francoeur makes a group of fans very happy by signing autographs for them at Disney's Wide World of Sports outside Orlando, where the Braves will be training and playing exhibition games throughout March.

GRAPEFRUIT SEASON

NO MATTER HOW MANY times fans hear, "It doesn't matter, because it's only spring training," they still keep an eye on the W-L column when the Grapefruit League standings begin taking shape. So, before you get too caught up in this year's exhibition results, take a look at the following chart.

What you'll find is that there really is no correlation between the Braves' spring training record and their regular season record since moving to Atlanta in 1966. Some years, there is an interesting similarity, but in many years, the records are very different.

Since regulars seldom play full games, pitchers' work is even more limited than in the regular season, and many games end with minor league lineups on the field for both teams, it only makes sense that a team's record in Florida cannot be a true indicator of what will follow the next six months. This year, a team's spring record should be even less indicative of its season potential due to the fact that some top players - Chipper Jones and Brian McCann in the Braves' case - will spend part of March playing for Team USA in the World Baseball Classic (WBC), leaving the Atlanta lineup sorely depleted.

Still, there's always the temptation, to some degree, to judge a team's strength by its spring training record. So, let the speculation begin.

The Braves were scheduled to open a 35-game exhibition season Feb. 25 at Lakeland against Detroit. The home opener at Disney's Wide World of Sports is the next day, Feb. 26, against Houston at 1:05 p.m.

Atlanta has 18 games scheduled at 9,500-seat Champion Stadium, including Mar. 4 and 28 against the Yankees, Mar. 1 and 8 against the defending World Champion Phillies, and WBC exhibitions against Panama (Mar. 3) and Venezuela (Mar. 5).

Prior to opening the regular season Sunday, April 5, at Philadelphia (8 p.m., ESPN2), Bobby Cox's club hosts the Detroit Tigers at Turner Field for exhibition games April 3 and 4.

See page 53 for the complete exhibition schedule, as well as ticket information.

COMPARE THE SEASONS

YEAR	SPRING	REGULAR
1966	13-13	85-77
1967	12-13	77-85
1968	13-11	81-81
1969	11-12	93-69
1970	15-17	76-86
1971	13-14	82-80
1972	8-12	70-84
1973	4-18-1	76-85
1974	10-11-1	88-74
1975	9-19	67-94
1976	16-14	70-92
1977	8-8-1	61-101
1978	14-11	69-93
1979	16-10	66-94
1980	10-9	81-80
1981	15-15	50-56
1982	18-7	89-73
1983	13-15	88-74
1984	13-13	80-82
1985	18-11	66-96
1986	18-11	72-89
1987	16-14	69-92
1988	8-21	54-106
1989	16-12	63-97
1990	7-7	65-97
1991	15-12	94-68
1992	10-19	98-64
1993	17-11-2	104-58
1994	20-9	68-46
1995	3-8	90-54
1996	16-10-1	96-66
1997	10-18	101-61
1998	13-17-1	106-56
1999	17-13	103-59
2000	14-17	95-67
2001	12-13-3	88-74
2002	15-14-2	101-59
2003	17-12-2	101-61
2004	14-17	96-66
2005	12-15-1	90-72
2006	11-18-3	79-83
2007	18-12-2	84-78
2008	15-15	72-90

OMAR-OF-ALL-TRADES

The Braves signed versatile **Omar Infante**, who could have been a free agent after the 2009 season, to a two-year contract for the 2009 and 2010 seasons that also includes a club option for 2011. He would have been eligible for arbitration.

Infante, 27, became a Brave in a December 2007 trade with the Cubs. He hit .293 with 24 doubles, 3 home runs and 40 RBIs last year, and led all Atlanta regulars with a .341 batting average with runners in scoring position. He hit .300 over his final 54 games after July 23. Infante appeared in 96 games, the most since he played in 121 in 2005.

The versatile Infante started 77 games at five different positions last season, including third base (26), left field (26), shortstop (15), second base (9) and center field (1). He also hit in seven different spots in the batting order. He has appeared in 590 career major league games in parts of seven seasons with the Tigers and Braves. He was traded from Detroit to the Cubs after the 2007 season, but was traded to Atlanta before playing for the Cubs. He owns a .260 career batting average.

ARBITRATION SCORE

The Braves signed **Mike Gonzalez**, **Matt Diaz** and **Casey Kotchman** to one-year contracts, avoiding arbitration and leaving **Jeff Francoeur** and **Kelly Johnson** as the only potential arbitration cases. This is the first time Francoeur and Johnson have been eligible. Arbitration hearings are scheduled Feb. 1-21.

WBC MANIA

As many as 15 Braves could be competing in this year's World Baseball Classic (WBC), though final rosters weren't due to be set until Feb. 24. **Chipper Jones** and **Brian McCann** are on the provisional roster of Team USA. Other Braves, including farmhands, on provisional rosters include: **Gregor Blanco** (Venezuela), **Javier Vazquez** (Puerto Rico), **Jair Jurrjens** (The Netherlands), **Jorge Campillo** (Mexico), **Manny Acosta**, **Jose Camarena**, **Yeliar Castro**, **Dimaster Delgado**, **Randall Delgado** and **Concepcion Rodriguez** (Panama), **Scott Diamond** and **Bryan Dumesnil** (Canada), **Phil Stockman** and **Mathew Kennelly** (Australia).

The first round opens Mar. 5 in Tokyo, with defending champion Japan facing China. Mexico City, Toronto and San Juan, Puerto Rico, host the other three first-round brackets, as follows: Tokyo (Mar. 5-9) - Japan, China, Chinese Taipei and Korea; Toronto (Mar. 7-11) - USA, Canada, Venezuela and Italy; San Juan, Puerto Rico (Mar. 7-11) - Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Netherlands, Panama; Mexico City (Mar. 8-12) - Mexico, Cuba, South Africa, Australia.

It's a double-elimination format in the first two rounds. The winners from Toronto will meet the winners from Puerto Rico in the second round at Miami's Dolphin Stadium, and the winners from Tokyo will meet the winners from Mexico City in San Diego's Petco Park. The semifinals and finals are Mar. 21 and 23 at Dodger Stadium.

Former Braves on provisional rosters include **Pete Orr** (Canada) and **Joey Devine** (U.S.).

SHORT HOPS

- At press time, the Braves had made a one-year contract offer to free agent **Tom Glavine** and were waiting on Glavine's response.

WE'RE STILL EXPLORING AN ADDITION IN LEFT FIELD

SPRING TRAINING for those of us in the game and for the fans is a special time when we all look forward to seeing our new team on the field for the first time, as it's been put together, and getting a feel for the young players who are coming up for the first time to play in big league camp.

There's lots of optimism, especially after last year and all the injuries we had. We added a lot of pitchers, and because of that, I think there's a lot of optimism and interest in seeing our club.

As far as Tom Glavine's status, we had a real good conversation, and we're both trying to figure out how to make it work to have him back. Tommy said that if he's back pitching for the Braves, he certainly would want the Braves to have another outfielder, another bat in the lineup, and he understands our budget considerations. We're both trying to get something done under the constraints we have.

As I said last month, Peter Moylan continues to do very well in rehab. The latest update is that nothing has changed in that regard. He's progressing very well, and we won't be surprised if he's ready close to Opening Day.

Tim Hudson also is clearly on schedule at this point. The biggest thing is trying to hold him back, because he feels so good. He could prove to be one of the best "trading deadline acquisitions" anyone could make!

Rafael Soriano came in to see the doctors recently. Everything looks positive, and he's throwing with no trouble. We'll see what transpires when he gets up to game speed, but so far, he feels good.

It's too early to know if he'll be full speed from the start of spring training. If we need to keep him limited early, it probably wouldn't mean he wouldn't be ready for Opening Day. We've got an extended spring training this year, so the guys have a little more time to get ready.

> "AS FAR AS THE COMPETITION IN CENTER FIELD, JOSH ANDERSON IS THE LEADER GOING INTO SPRING TRAINING..."

Kenshin Kawakami is one of about a dozen players who reported to camp a few days early, which is great. He's worked out and thrown on the side and has been getting acclimated to the new surroundings with a tour of the Disney facility.

I think we're in good shape, health-wise, going into camp. So far, everything is positive. Yunel Escobar had a shoulder sprain at the end of last season, but all he needed was a couple of months of rest.

We're still looking to make an addition in the outfield, and that probably would be a leftfielder, because we don't see a centerfielder out there. With our strong pitching and the guys we have coming back, we don't feel like we have to jump to fill that need immediately. We can do it during the spring or even early in the season.

Matt Diaz has been a good hitter in the past and could be part of a platoon in left, maybe with one of the kids, Brandon Jones or Jordan Schafer, who bat left-handed.

As far as the competition in center field, Josh Anderson is the leader going into spring training because of his speed and ability to steal bases. Gregor Blanco and Schafer also can play center very well.

Everything we've seen and heard about Jeff Francoeur's work is very encouraging. He has to keep his mindset and keep his swing mechanically sound, and we think he's very dedicated to doing that.

It's up to Bobby, of course, but right now it looks like Brian McCann would be our cleanup hitter, but that could change, depending on adding a player. As far as the leadoff hitter, again it's Bobby's decision, but right now it looks like it could be Anderson, depending on how he swings the bat in the spring.

TEE FOR DAL CANTON

THE SECOND annual Braves Memorial Golf Tournament is scheduled Mar. 16 at the Lake Buena Vista Golf Course at Disney World. Braves player development staff members and special guests will participate in the private event to honor and pay tribute to former staff members that have passed away and to reflect on their contributions to the organization.

This year the event will pay special tribute to **Bruce Dal Canton**, who served the Braves as a major league pitcher (1975-76), major league pitching coach (1987-90) and minor league pitching coach (1982-86, '91-2008). He was the only pitching coach the Myrtle Beach Pelicans ever had until he died Oct. 7 at age 66.

Last year's inaugural tournament paid tribute to former coaches **Jim Beauchamp** and **Mel Roberts**. Proceeds from the event will go to a selected charity in the name of past staff members.

ON THE ROAD

Jeff Francoeur made several appearances in the past month. On Jan. 26, he spoke to 500 people at a dinner and reception prior to his appearance at the First Pitch Classic dinner at the Mercer University Center in Macon, Ga., to raise funds for the Mercer baseball program. It was the largest crowd in the five-year history of the center. Nearly 125 fans got Francoeur's autograph and posed for pictures with him. Afterward, Mercer coach **Craig Gibson** presented Francoeur, who attended with his wife, **Catie**, and high school coach **Hugh Buchanan** and his wife, with a check to Children's Healthcare of Atlanta.

He spoke at Columbus State University's Lumpkin Center on Jan. 15 about his faith and how it has helped his career during a gathering sponsored by the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. And on Feb. 5, Francoeur made an appearance at Westminster Schools in Augusta, Ga., to talk to baseball players of all ages about the game.

THE SPAHNIE

The first **Warren Spahn** Award Gala held in Oklahoma City was a huge success Jan. 17, attracting a crowd of 450, including new Yankees lefthander **CC Sabathia**, who picked up his second straight "Spahnie" and called it "the nicest trophy in baseball."

The Bricktown Rotary Club, in conjunction with the Oklahoma Sports Museum of Guthrie and the **Jim Thorpe** Association hosted the 10th annual event at the Cox Center in Oklahoma's capital city.

BRICKTOWN ROTARY CLUB

CC Sabathia shows off his second straight Warren Spahn Award, given annually to the best lefthander in baseball as determined by a formula combining wins, ERA and strikeouts.

SOUND OF MUSIC

The Braves are looking for bands that think they have what it takes to energize and entertain thousands of fans at Turner Field before a game. Country, rock, pop, cover, or original bands can submit their information for review at braves.com/bravesbands.

Those selected to perform will receive free tickets for their members to that night's game and a special discount code to pass along to their loyal followers to see them live in action.

One group will be named the "Braves Band of the Year" and win a free suite to the final home game of the season. The "Band of the Year" will be chosen by the Braves game entertainment staff, who will judge the groups based on a combination of factors, including crowd participation and enthusiasm.

HELPING HANDS

For the eleventh consecutive year, the Atlanta Braves Foundation helped facilitate Hosea Feed the Hungry and Homeless' annual event to serve people in need on **Martin Luther King Jr.** Day, Jan. 19. A seven-course meal was served, and many services were offered to those present at Turner Field. **Hank Aaron** and his 755 Restaurant Corporation donated more than 200 turkeys to the Hosea Feed the Hungry dinner to help feed more than 2,000 people at the event.

HISTORY IN ACTION

In commemoration of Black History Month, the Atlanta Braves partnered with the 100 Black Men of Atlanta for a special visit with students at The B.E.S.T. Academy Feb. 10.

Representatives from the Braves front office, 100 Black Men of Atlanta program director **Ray M. Singer**, and Peachtree TV's **Jeff "J.J." Johnson**, spoke to students about what African American role models most impacted their lives and the importance of education.

BALLS & STRIKES

- **Brandon Jones** was honored and had his high school jersey retired in a ceremony before a packed gym Feb. 10 at Wewahitchka (Florida) High School.
- **Matt Diaz** was the guest speaker at First Presbyterian Church's 32nd Annual Turner Memorial Breakfast Jan. 30 in Greenville, S.C.
- **Steve Bedrosian** (RHP, 1981-85, '93-95), who has lived near Atlanta in Coweta County since his days with the Braves, was inducted into the Coweta Sports Hall of Fame during ceremonies Feb. 14. He has been extremely active in community affairs, serving on the Coweta County Board of Education, working as a community baseball coach at East Coweta High School and as an active member of Son Rise Church in Newnan.
- **Joe Winkelsas** (RHP, 1999) was the first inductee into the University of South Carolina Salkehatchie Athletic Hall of Fame Jan. 29 in Walterboro, S.C. He spoke at a dinner in his honor and also threw out the first pitch of the season opener. He now operates a baseball academy, The Diamond, in his hometown of Buffalo, N.Y.
- The late **Lloyd "Little Poison" Waner** (OF, 1941) was inducted into the East Central University Athletic Hall of Fame in Ada, Okla., on Feb. 4.
- **Josh Anderson** took part in the Lexington Legends (Astros) annual radio caravan stop in Somerset, Ky., in February. Anderson played for the Legends when he was in the Astros farm system and is a native of Kentucky who attended Eastern Kentucky University.
- **Phil Niekro** (RHP, 1964-83, '87) addressed 350 people in Buford Academy's gym during the All Pro Dad's breakfast on Jan. 27. All Pro Dad is the fatherhood program of Family First, a national non-profit organization.

BOBBY COX

MANAGER

WE'RE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT OUR CHANCE TO CONTEND

IT'S ALWAYS GREAT to see the players who come to work out during the last few weeks of the off-season. Hitters use the cages at Turner Field, and many of the pitchers take advantage of the early throwing program during the first week of February.

I think our entire team is way ahead of where we finished last season. We've made some great changes by adding three starting pitchers to our rotation, something that's hard to do, especially in one off-season.

There are a lot of things I'm anxious to see at spring training. First, I want to watch Javier Vazquez, Derek Lowe and Kenshin Kawakami in action. I've seen Vazquez and Lowe, of course, but I haven't seen Kawakami except on film. I think it's going to be exciting to see all three of them pitching for the Braves in spring training games.

I'm anxious to see Mike Gonzalez, Rafael Soriano and Peter Moylan all back healthy and pitching. We have the makings of a great pitching staff with a lot of balance.

We've got a couple of good new left-handed pitchers, Eric O'Flaherty and Boone Logan. I watched O'Flaherty a couple of times before spring training, and he looked good. He's got good stuff. We wanted to trade for him a couple of years ago, but he hurt his back. He's fine now, and we think he can help us in the bullpen. The White Sox were really high on Logan, and he pitched great for them at the start of last season.

I'm anxious to see how Jeff Francoeur's hard work this off-season translates on the field. I know he's worked hard to lose some of the weight he gained last off-season, and he's found a stance and swing he's comfortable with.

> "I'M ANXIOUS TO SEE MIKE GONZALEZ, RAFAEL SORIANO AND PETER MOYLAN ALL BACK HEALTHY AND PITCHING."

The fact is, Frenchy drove in 100 runs each of his first two seasons he played major league baseball and knocked in almost 80 last year (71) during a season I think even he would say was a bad year for him. I believe his skill is there. He's a hitter, and he'll definitely bounce back this season.

Francoeur will play right field, but the rest of the outfield is up for grabs. Matt Diaz will play left field, but both Gregor Blanco and Josh Anderson played well out in center field, and Anderson played in left field, too.

Jordan Schafer will be in camp and is in the mix for the outfield. No one should rule out Schafer making the team out of camp. He missed a lot of playing time last year because of his suspension, but that will not factor into any decisions about him making the team.

Our infield is really good. I don't think there's anyone better than Yunel Escobar at shortstop. Kelly Johnson was great at second and was hitting great at the end of last season. Casey Kotchman and Chipper Jones have the corners.

We have talked about getting another "big bat" in the lineup and that would be great. But if not, we have a lot of speed. There are plenty of ways to skin a cat.

There won't be as many veterans to hear my annual spring training talk this year! I don't go in for a big pep talk, but I always tell the players that everyone is in the hunt for a job and that there are almost always surprises.

That's one of the great things about this time of the year. Every team starts at the same place, and the same is true for the players.

We definitely feel optimistic going into the season, and it's mainly because we addressed the biggest issue we had at the end of last season - starting pitching. We set some priorities, find starting pitching, and we got what we needed. Between that and hopefully getting everyone back who was hurt last year, we believe we can contend in our division.

PLAYING PEPPER

CHIPPER JONES

ATLANTA BRAVES

The defending National League batting champ says he's bullish on 2009 and believes he's capable of winning another batting crown and that the team is capable of contending for the division title.

INTERVIEW BY
PATTY RASMUSSEN

CHOPTALK: You've come within a couple of hits of winning back-to-back batting titles the last two seasons. Can you win a second straight title this year?

CHIPPER JONES: I see no reason why I can't. Of course what you don't know is the number that it's going to take and how other guys, like Albert Pujols, are going to play. So, I don't worry about it. I was disappointed in my power numbers overall last year (22 HR, 75 RBIs). They were strong in the first half (16 HR, 46 RBIs through June 30), but they were hurt by the tendinitis in my shoulder in the second half (6 HR, 29 RBIs from July 1-end of September). I want to be able to go out and create those instant power offense moments. I'll be looking to strike the happy medium of consistent hitting and power.

CT: How do you feel, physically? Is there any soreness in your shoulder that limited you to pinch-hitting the last week and a half of last season? What have you done to strengthen the shoulder?

JONES: I feel good. Having three to four months of non-baseball helps me heal pretty well. Nothing from last year has kept me from working out. I've been swinging the bat since December and working out since November. Hopefully, what I'm doing is going to stick with me through the year. Everyone feels dinged up in August. There's no getting around that. My approach is the same as it's always been. I want to play every day, and that's my goal at the start of each season. I know I'd be kidding myself if I think that's actually going to happen, but I believe I can play 150 games, barring unforeseen absences. I think I'm capable. You can't account for unfortunate things that happen and how long it takes your body to recover. I've done a lot of what we call "Jobes" (for Dr. Frank Jobe, pioneering orthopedic surgeon), exercises that strengthen the shoulder muscles, the rotator cuff. I really felt the (shoulder) tendinitis toward the end of the season. It really hurt when I was throwing. It hurt when I'd swing, but only when I fully extended from the right side. What kept me out of the lineup was my inability to throw across the infield. I think the shoulder strengthening will go a long way to alleviate that pain. I use a lot of resistance bands, weighted balls, and light weights to build up the muscles around the area that hurts.

CT: What was your approach to off-season conditioning, and how has it compared to past years? What about your diet? Do you still like to eat at McDonald's?

JONES: I readily admit I'm a fast food junkie! But I go back to a couple of years ago when I lost a lot of weight, changed my diet, worked on my core, and then pulled an oblique muscle two weeks into the season that gave me trouble all year. That had never happened to me before, and it hasn't happened since. I stick to my own regimen and try to eat healthy. I eat a lot more chicken, pasta, rice and salads, but occasionally a double Quarter Pounder and Biggie Fries calls my name! In terms of working out, I had a weight room installed at my house at the beginning of the off-season, and I started working out there after taking some time for my shoulder to rest. It was probably mid-November when I started, and I've seen no ill effects from the things that bothered me during the season. I'm a shoulder to wrist guy. I work a lot on strengthening my shoulders, my wrists, my forearms, with lots of front and back curls. This year I started running on a treadmill. I'm running a lot more. Last year when I got to spring training, I felt like my legs weren't ready. My feet felt heavy, I felt slow, and it took most of spring training for me to feel quick. It's not strenuous running, but I do short runs, maybe a mile or two for stamina, and some short sprints for quickness. Of all the workout related things I do, running is my least favorite, but it's going to help. I work out four times a week, Monday, Wednesday, Friday and usually Sunday if I'm traveling. I'll lift all those days, and usually run, though not always.

CT: Are you optimistic about the season - personally and as a team?

JONES: I am optimistic both personally and as a team. I believe I'm poised to have a really good season again. I think every year is another year that I have to prove myself. I hear and read what people say and write about me. Because of some injuries, I've gotten the rap of being an injury prone third baseman. No matter what I do, win an MVP award or a batting title, I'm never going to make everyone happy. But I'm confident that I'll go out and produce good numbers. As far as the team is concerned, I'm more optimistic now than I was in early January. With the addition of Derek Lowe and Kenshin Kawakami we have a deep starting rotation that eats up innings. Combine that with a healthy bullpen, and we have a pretty good team. One tweak, if I had to make one, would be to get one more solid stick in the middle of the lineup, but I believe that Frank Wren and John Schuerholz are doing their best to make that happen. I told Frank at our meeting

> "I'LL BE LOOKING TO STRIKE THE HAPPY MEDIUM OF CONSISTENT HITTING AND POWER."

in January, "The fans and the players have gone through a roller coaster ride reading about guys like Jake Peavy, A.J. Burnett, Rafael Furcal, John Smoltz, coming here and then not coming here. But in two days, all of a sudden you've turned it around to be one of the best rotations in the division." The optimism is back, but it all starts with the starting rotation.

CT: How long do you want to play?

JONES: I'll be 37 in April, and I don't see any reason why I can't play until I'm 40. I still like playing, and I look forward to spring training. I still have the desire to compete and to play the entire season toward a goal of going to the post-season and winning. When the day comes that I don't look forward to going to spring training and when I look more forward to the off-season than to playing, I'll know it's time to go. I know I have a shelf life in this game, and I need to take advantage of the time I have. I have some things I'd like to accomplish, and at this point, I think I can play another four to five years.

CT: Last year, you told ChopTalk you'd only continue playing as long as you can bat third... still feel that way?

JONES: (Chuckles) I'll put it this way: If there was a third baseman in the Braves organization who was better than me who could make the Braves a better ballclub and help us win, I'd switch positions. I want to win. The same goes for hitting third in the lineup. If there's a guy I need to protect in the three hole, I'll gladly do it. At this point, I think I'll be hitting third this year.

CT: You, like a lot of people, were critical of the Braves when Smoltz left for Boston. Do you think you spoke too soon and too harshly?

> "I WANT TO PLAY EVERY DAY, AND THAT'S MY GOAL AT THE START OF EACH SEASON."

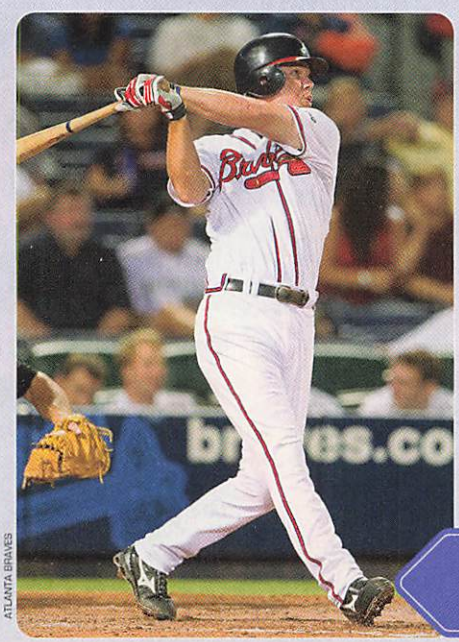
JONES: Maybe a bit harshly... I don't know. I stand by my comments in that I wanted John to retire as a Brave. All things being equal, there's still no one I'd rather have on the mound in a big game situation than John Smoltz. When I made those comments, at that point in our off-season, stuff wasn't making sense to me, and even now I still wish there could have been a way to make (signing Smoltz) work. That said, John can go on every radio show, speak to every newspaper and magazine and tell his side, but the more I think about it, the more I believe that he probably thought this was his last shot to go out and see what was out there and play for what he believed would be a winner. The Braves made an offer - whether it was fair is debatable - but I can see both sides now. The Braves had concerns for his health and how much he could pitch. If he throws 10 pitches and calls it quits, Frank Wren looks like a genius. If John helps Boston win a World Series, John looks pretty smart. There's no doubt I spoke out of frustration, and I apologized to Frank for that. At that point, he hadn't signed D-Lowe and KK. The optimism is back though.

CT: So you think this team, this starting rotation, can contend in the NL East and beyond?

JONES: Absolutely we can contend. It's not an overpowering rotation, but they can give you innings, and that's what this staff needs and has needed for years. The starting staff, because of injuries, hasn't been able to give us innings, and that's overexposed the bullpen. It overworked the bullpen. It's like a domino effect. Guys in the bullpen weren't able to fall into their proper roles or get proper rest. But when the starter goes out and gives you six to eight innings, then guys like Peter Moylan, Rafael Soriano and Mike Gonzalez fall into their roles, and you can throw in some other guys, Manny Acosta, Blaine Boyer, to spell guys who need a break... Then the offense can get through the order and get an idea of what type of pitching we're up against without having every at-bat magnified or having to play catch up.

CT: At the time of Smoltz's departure, you said, "Every dog has its day" and that your day "is not far off." Were you just preparing yourself for the possibility of not coming back, or do you really believe there's little to no chance of that happening?

JONES: Dale Murphy got traded. David Justice was traded. Greg Maddux and Tom Glavine left to free agency. John Smoltz left. Now here I am in the last year of my contract, and up to this point, there's no extension on the table. At the end of this season, I'm eligible for free agency. God forbid the Braves are out of the race by the end of July, but if they were, a trade makes sense. Letting me get away for nothing would be bad business on their part. At this point, everything is in play - signing an extension, trade, free agency. Obviously, signing an extension is my first choice. I'm confident an offer will be made, and I understand why one hasn't been made. The Braves have had bigger fish to fry this off-season. They're trying to address issues for this season and beyond, and I'm under contract for this year. The last thing I want to do is negotiate during the season. I've done it before, and it's distracting. I'll never say never, regarding negotiating during the



ATLANTA BRAVES

Chipper, who turns 37 April 24, thinks he can play until he's 40 and hopes he'll soon have a contract extension that will enable him to do that as a Brave.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 21

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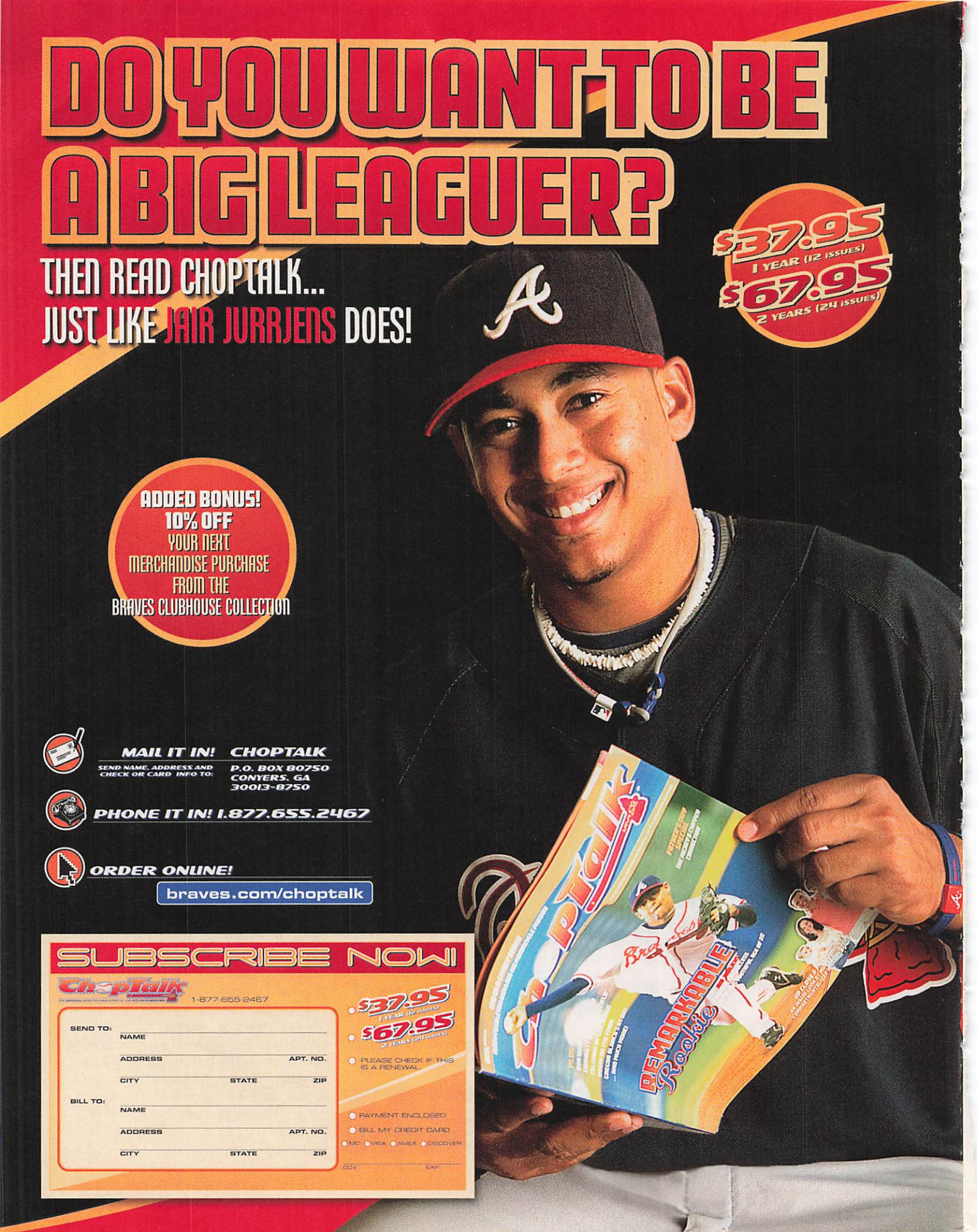

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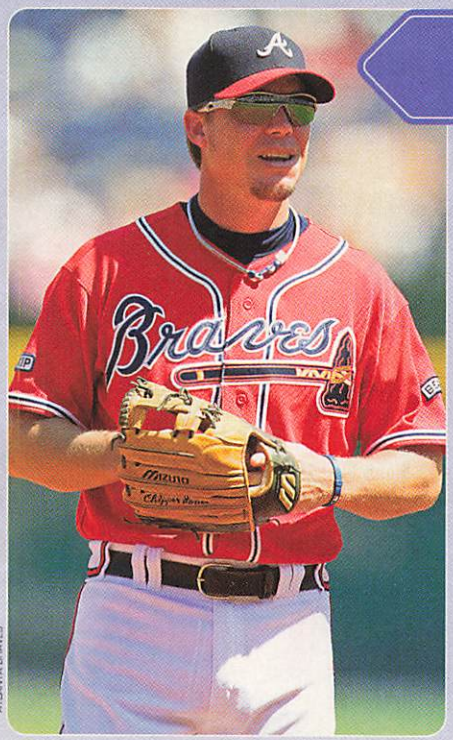


ATLANTA BRAVES

Chipper's combined batting average over the last three seasons is .342, the highest in the majors and four points better than runnerup Albert Pujols.

season, but I hope they want me focused on the game at hand.

CT: You also say you want to stay in Atlanta, but what's it going to take to keep you here? How many years? How much money?

JONES: I've thrown around all kinds of numbers with my agent, and I'm not going to get into specific numbers with the media. That said, I don't want a one-year deal. I want a multi-year deal. It makes no sense for me to not have one, because I'd find myself in this same situation at the end of next year. Money wise, I just want what's fair. I feel I've carried my weight on this team. There's a lot of money thrown around in this game. I don't want to break the bank. I just want what's fair.

CT: In a broader sense, is there really any loyalty on either side - player or owner? Since it's a business, isn't it all about money on the players' side - though you certainly get credit for reworking your contract so the Braves could sign Tim Hudson - and balancing money and trying to win on the owners' side? Aren't good fans the only ones who really display any loyalty?

JONES: Of the three parties, fans are the most loyal, absolutely. I'd put it fans, players, ownership. For players like me or someone like Smoltz, it's hard to imagine playing elsewhere when you've been loyal to an organization for 20 to 20-plus years. You can't do that and not grow attached. If I went elsewhere, it would be culture shock. I believe ownership is all about the financial/performance part. The second they get a glimpse or a hunch that a player's performance is slipping, they're cutting ties. It's very much "what have you done for me lately." That's understandable, but when (a player) has made sacrifices, it's tough to swallow. For me, in the long run, I know that whether or not I finish my career here, I'll always be thought of as a Brave. I know I'm a Brave through and through.

CT: You talk about sacrifices, but you weren't born with a silver spoon in your mouth and neither was Smoltz. Do you understand the average fan's dismay when they hear him say he harbored "no ill will toward the Braves" after he was given fair compensation for services rendered? You guys make a nice living.

JONES: You're right, of course. You quoted me speaking out of frustration, and who's to say that a month or two down the line, John wouldn't admit that he spoke out of frustration, as well. We've been given an awesome opportunity to be part of an organization that pays us well and gives us the chance to make a really good living for ourselves and our families. The Braves gave me an opportunity that no one else did.

CT: If a team wants to contend, do you think it can afford to "gamble", as you've put it, on aging players for sentimental reasons, or does it need to take a more pragmatic approach and make the player moves it thinks will enable it to contend - without regard to sentiment?

JONES: That's the $64 million question, and that's why Frank Wren, now, and John Schuerholz, in years past, were paid to make those decisions. And they're not easy decisions, by any means. Whether it's Andruw Jones, Tom Glavine, Smoltz and ultimately me... it's not a job I'd want. Would I make some of the same decisions Frank made? Probably. Other decisions, maybe not. It all goes back to the approach I have to take as I enter the season. I'm not going to make everyone happy. There will be times when the organization has to cut ties with someone, and we'll all have to move on. I'm glad I don't have to make those decisions.

CT: How important is it for the Braves to find another bat, or can they contend with the team they have right now?

JONES: I'll think we'll be very competitive, regardless of whether or not they're able to find another hitter. The starting pitching, the number of innings they'll give us, probably makes us more competitive (even) without another bat. Everyone is going to have to play up to their best. That said, another big bat could catapult us into instant contender.

> "I AM OPTIMISTIC BOTH PERSONALLY AND AS A TEAM. I BELIEVE I'M POISED TO HAVE A REALLY GOOD SEASON AGAIN."

ATLANTA BRAVES

Ace High!

WHY DEREK LOWE'S SUPER SINKER MAKES THE NEW ROTATION A FORCE TO CONTEND WITH

BY JON COOPER

The year 1991 is magical in Braves history.

Especially poignant is the memory of Michigan native John Smoltz jumping into the arms of catcher Greg Olson in celebration of clinching the National League West, which began the Braves' magical transformation from doormat to dynasty.

As the 2009 season approaches, the Braves hope to return to glory on the right arm of another Michigan native, who can point to 1991 as a turning point in his career. Derek Lowe, who grew up in Dearborn, about 20 miles from where Smoltz grew up in Warren, took on that responsibility when he signed a four-year, $60 million contract with Atlanta on Jan. 15 (two days after Smoltz left for Boston).

Lowe is familiar with the Braves' tradition and is eager to help author the next chapter.

"Winning, that is what [the Braves have] always done," said Lowe, who, at 35, begins his 13th major league season with a 126-107 record (a .541 winning percentage) and a 3.75 ERA. "I think more than anything, it's starting pitching. You look at all the Cy Youngs those three guys [Smoltz, Tom Glavine and Greg Maddux] have won over the years. Hopefully, over the next four years, they're going to remember me as a guy that contributed to this team."

Frank Wren is confident that will happen.

"Derek Lowe is a competitor who gives us three guys in the top 10 in the National League in ground-ball efficiency (joining Tim Hudson and Jair Jurrjens)," Wren said. "When you go to Philadelphia, a hitters' ballpark, and you have guys hitting the ball on the ground, it stays in the park. [The Mets' new] Citi Field also may be a hitters' ballpark. If that's the case, having another sinkerballer would be helpful there, as well."

But Lowe remembers a time when the thought of being the Atlanta Braves' ace - or even a professional baseball player - was a long shot.

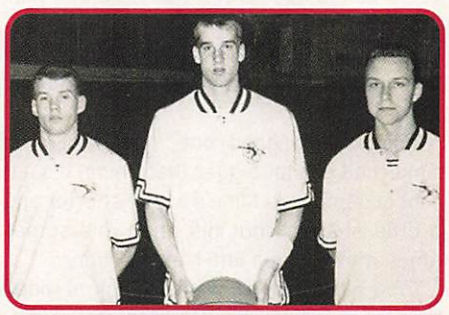
"Baseball was probably my fourth or fifth [best sport]. Basketball was No. 1 (like Smoltz), soccer [where he was a midfielder], golf and then baseball," said Lowe, a four-sport star at Edsel Ford High School in Dearborn. "I played [baseball] because it was that time of year. I really wasn't very good at it."

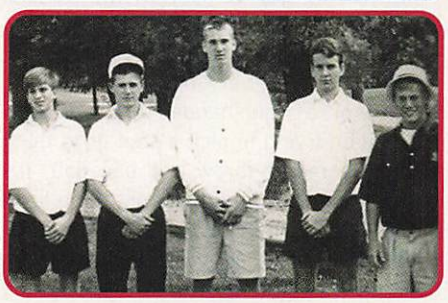
Then came 1991. As a senior, Lowe, who stood 6-foot-6, seemed destined to attend Eastern Michigan on a basketball scholarship when fate intervened in the form of the Seattle Mariners, who drafted him in the eighth round.

"I only won two high school games my whole career, with like a six and a half ERA," recalled a smiling Lowe, who pitched as a senior but played most of his career at shortstop. "I wasn't very good. I'm not lying."

His pitching may not have been very good, but his overall athleticism was, and it got him through the Class-A level. When he got to Jacksonville (Double A), he met pitching coach Jeff Andrews, who altered his career forever by introducing him to the sinkerball.

"I was at a crossroads in my career," said Lowe. "I needed to separate myself in the minor leagues. I needed to do something that no one else did. So that's where it started, and it's carried me the whole way."





Derek Lowe favored basketball and golf over baseball in high school, and he wasn't difficult to spot in team photos, thanks to his 6-foot-6 frame.

PHOTOS: EDSEL FORD HIGH SCHOOL

"He was very athletic, very long... he had very good hand-eye coordination, and he was basically kind of a four-seam guy who threw fastballs in either the middle or the top of the zone," remembered Andrews, currently a minor league instructor with the Texas Rangers after serving last season as the Pittsburgh Pirates' pitching coach. "I just thought that Derek would be able to do it fairly easily and quickly.

"To his credit, he believed in it. Within two or three years he had pretty much mastered it, not only what he could do with it, but the confidence he could throw it in tough situations and kind of making the sinker his marquee pitch."

The Mariners didn't share such confidence in Lowe, and after he had a cup of coffee in Seattle (12 appearances, 9 starts in 1997), he was sent to Boston with fellow minor leaguer Jason Varitek for reliever Heathcliff Slocumb on July 31, 1997.

The Red Sox pitching coach at the time was Joe Kerrigan, who saw Lowe's potential, if given time to develop.

"He was very athletic, and the thing that stood out right away was the sinker, how much movement he had on the sinker," said Kerrigan, who is replacing Andrews in Pittsburgh this season. "We brought him along slowly. He started out pitching the sixth, seventh inning. Then he graduated to setup man, eighth inning. Then, when [Tom] Gordon got hurt [in June of 1999], he took over the closer's role and was a very successful closer for us."

Lowe chalked up 85 saves in three-plus seasons as Boston's closer, including an American League-high 42-save effort in 2000 when he made his first of two All-Star teams.

He was moved to the rotation in 2002 with similarly superb results, throwing the first no-hitter at Fenway Park in 37 years on the way to going 21-8 with a 2.58 ERA (second in the American League), an and AL-high nine shutouts. He finished third in AL Cy Young voting and became only the third pitcher to have a 40-save season and a 20-win season in his career, joining Dennis Eckersley and Smoltz, who beat Lowe to the 40/20 club by a little over a month.

He went 17-7 in 2003 and excelled in the Division Series against Oakland (his 0-1 record belies his 0.93 ERA) and started to develop a reputation as a big-game pitcher.

Tim Hudson remembers how Lowe always gave Oakland hitters that sinking feeling.

"When he pitched with Boston, he was a guy we'd rather not face," recalled Hudson. "They had Pedro [Martinez] and [Curt] Schilling on that staff, but he was the one guy that none of our guys wanted to face."

Lowe enhanced his reputation by becoming the first pitcher to win the deciding games of the Division Series, Championship Series and World Series in the same postseason when Boston ended its 86-year "curse" in 2004.

However, he did not re-sign with the Red Sox, instead using free agency to sign with the Dodgers for the 2005 season. He won 54 games in his four years in L.A. and

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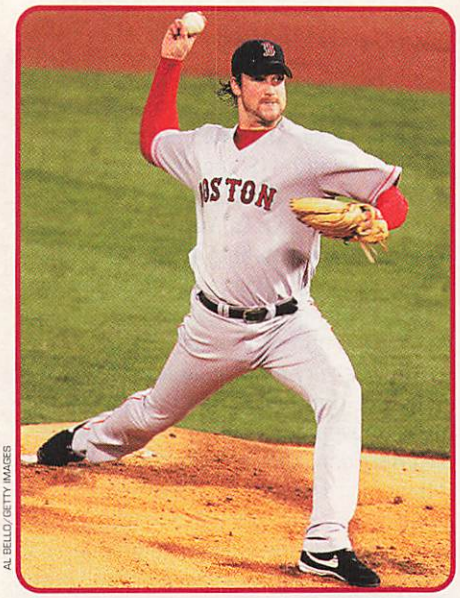
ALLISON SHIRREFFS



AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Lowe was the ace of the Red Sox bullpen in 2000, when he recorded 42 saves, and then became the big winner in the Boston rotation two years later when he was 21-8.

helped the Dodgers get to the playoffs twice. Last season, he was instrumental in helping the Dodgers win their first playoff series in 20 years, when L.A. swept the Cubs in the Division Series.

Atlanta's post-season "curse" isn't as long as Boston's or L.A.'s, but with Lowe in the rotation, there's a better chance the Braves' three-year absence could end soon. In 21 career post-season games (11 series), he's 6-5 with a 3.33 ERA.

Lowe is one of the majors' most successful starters since he moved out of the bullpen full-time in 2002. He is the only active pitcher to win at least 12 games every season since 2002, and only Houston's Roy Oswalt (115) and Toronto's Roy Halladay (113) have won more games in that span. But wins and losses alone aren't the sole measure of his value.

He's averaged 208 innings in 33 starts per season since 2002 and has never been on the disabled list. He's one of only two active pitchers with at least 12 years of service who can make that claim (Livan Hernandez is the other).

All that is welcome news to the Braves, who last season didn't have a single pitcher work 200 innings for the first time since 1945 and saw three-fifths of their projected rotation (Smoltz, Glavine and Hudson) go on the DL and contribute just one start after July 23.

"With Huddy [out until August rehabbing from elbow surgery], we needed a guy that could throw 200 innings," said Jeff Francoeur. "You look at us now, and I think we can compete, pitching-wise, with the Phillies and Mets."

For Braves hitters, there's an added benefit.

"I know I don't like facing him," said Brian McCann, who actually boasts a .313 career average against Lowe. "He's got the best sinker in baseball, commands the ball well, has a great slider, a great changeup. He's just a great pitcher."

"His ball moves all over the place," added Francoeur, who's hit only .200 against Lowe. "It's almost like he throws the same exact pitch every time, and you know it's coming - but you still can't hit it."

That sinker makes Lowe an infielder's dream - he gets 64.4 percent of his outs on the ground. He led the majors in 2006 with 487 groundball outs and was third last year with 393.

Hudson, whose sinker also is considered one of baseball's best, is impressed by Lowe's.

"He's got a good one," he said. "His sinkerball is a lot bigger than mine. It's got a lot of depth to it. Mine's a little shorter and a little sharper, but his, man, his sometimes moves like a left-handed slider."

"You almost don't want to look at video tape, because you go, 'Oh man, this is discouraging. I've got to go deal with that?'" added hitting coach Terry Pendleton. "That's a 6-6 guy coming off the mound, he's already in your face when he's coming off the mound. Now the ball's not staying straight. It's just very difficult as a left-handed or a right-handed hitter to stay focused on trying to pick a spot or to think where he might throw the baseball. It's never straight. It's the toughest thing for a hitter to do, to hit a ball that's not straight."

Kerrigan sees a correlation between Lowe's easy delivery and his easy-going personality.

"He's got a nice, free, loose delivery, and he's kind of a free spirit, loose guy," he said. "They go hand-in-hand. He's a great kid, got a great heart."

"The thing about Derek that people don't understand - this guy flips the ball in the air, he kind of does strange things on the mound, like he's not really there, but he's one of the most intelligent pitchers that you'll ever come across," added Andrews. "He has a knack for remembering at-bats. He has the ability to pitch to hitters' weaknesses. He's not just a guy that stands out there. He knows what he's doing."

Off the field, Lowe knows what he's doing on the golf course.

"I'm a huge golfer and [Atlanta has] got great golf courses," said Lowe, a two-handicap who calls Chicago's Medinah his favorite course.

He's also looking forward to meeting Braves fans. He got a head start on that in late-January, attending the Braves Foundation's inaugural Diamond Gala and participating in AutographFest, where the suite he shared with Pendleton was packed for the entire two hours.

Lowe donates lots of time and money to various charities. The Dodgers' 2007 nominee for the Roberto Clemente Award, he helped raise money on several occasions for the Mattel Children's Hospital, worked with the Massachusetts Teachers Association Literacy Day, and supported Junior Achievement and Garth Brooks' Touch 'em All Foundation. He's a big fan of Brooks, but that played only a small part in his contributing to Touch 'em All.

"You're able to see what they've done with the money, and it's pretty easy to do every year," said Lowe. "[Brooks is] a unique guy. He does a great job."

Lowe also is an advocate for sun safety, an issue that is personal for him.

"I had skin cancer in 2002, and whenever you actually have cancer, it probably hits home a little bit more," he said. "I've been very fortunate to be able to play this game for a long time and help a lot of kids."

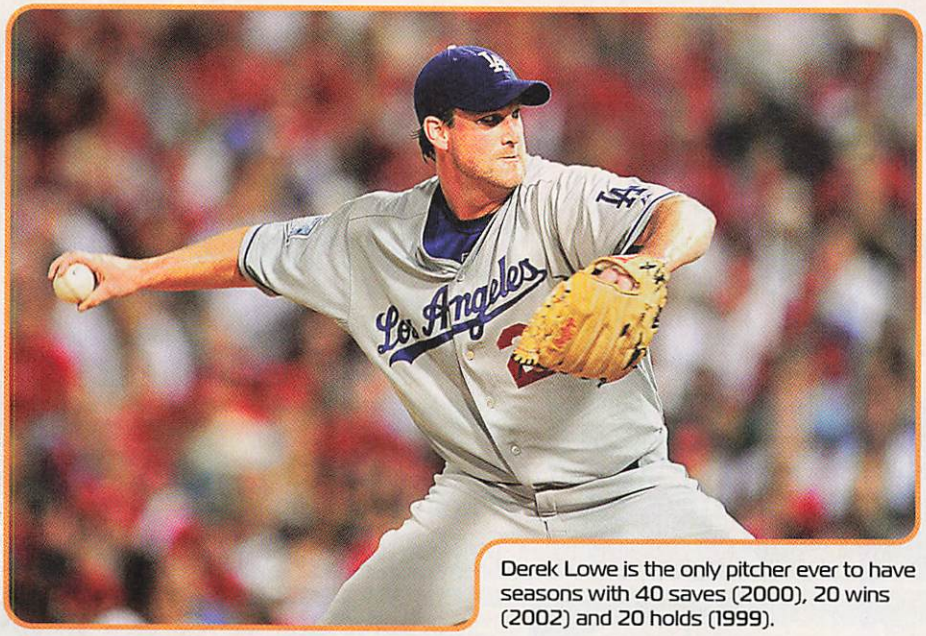
If he weren't playing baseball, the father of three (two boys and a girl) knows he'd be helping kids and knows where he'd be doing it.

"[I'd be a] high school teacher, guaranteed," he said. "Gym."

LISA BLUMENFELD/GETTY IMAGES

In the last four seasons with the Dodgers, Lowe averaged nearly 14 wins per year with a 3.59 ERA, and in the last three seasons, he's allowed an average of just 16 home runs.

LOWE'S THE FOUNDER OF 40/20/20 CLUB



JEFF ZELEVANSKY/GETTY IMAGES

Derek Lowe is the only pitcher ever to have seasons with 40 saves (2000), 20 wins (2002) and 20 holds (1999).

BY STEVE FALL

DEREK LOWE turns 36 this June, an age when most pitchers start to decline and face durability issues. But the Braves' new starter is no ordinary pitcher.

From his age-29 through 35 seasons, Lowe demonstrated historic durability. He is just the fifth pitcher since 1950 to start 32 games each year from age 29 through 35. The list includes former Braves Warren Spahn and Gaylord Perry, along with Jim Bunning and Steve Carlton. All four pitchers made the Hall of Fame. Aside from Bunning, they all continued to pitch effectively from age-36 and beyond.

Lowe spent the first five seasons of his career in the bullpen, which has enabled him to hold some rare distinctions. He went from a 40-save reliever in 2000 to a 20-game winner in 2002. John Smoltz and Dennis Eckersley – the other two pitchers to reach those levels – required six and 10 seasons respectively to combine those two achievements. Lowe also added a 20-hold season in 1999 when he excelled as setup man.

No other pitcher in major league history has posted 40-save, 20-win and 20-hold seasons in their career. Lowe managed to do this in a four-year span.

As a reliever, Lowe worked 74 games in both the 1999 and 2000 seasons. That makes the 6-foot-6 righthander one of just nine players to pitch in 70 games in successive seasons and also make 32 starts in consecutive years. He joins Charlie Hough, Dick Tidrow, Jeff Fassero, LaTroy Hawkins, Wilbur Wood and three pre-1900 pitchers: Monte Ward, Old Hoss Radbourn and Pud Galvin.

But Lowe delivered seven consecutive 32-start seasons along with his two straight 70-game seasons. Only Hough could match that feat among post-1900 pitchers. Radbourn and Galvin, both Hall of Famers, did so during the 1800s.

Lowe and Kenny Rogers are the only two active pitchers to make 250 career starts and 250 relief appearances. A total of 19 big league pitchers have reached these levels, including former Milwaukee Braves great Lou Burdette. However, since 1980, just Lowe, Rogers, Danny Darwin, Greg Swindell and ex-Brave Terry Mulholland have done this.

Lowe induces more groundballs than almost any other pitcher. His 2008 groundball-to-flyball ratio (2.63) ranked second behind Brandon Webb (3.15) among NL pitchers. Jair Jurrjens (1.94) placed sixth. Tim Hudson always ranks high in this category, as well, which means the Braves' infield defense will play a huge role in the team's 2009 success.

Since it's difficult for batters to elevate the ball against Lowe, he rarely surrenders home runs. Among active pitchers with at least 1,500 career innings pitched, he has allowed the second-fewest home runs per nine innings (.72). That trails only his new teammate Hudson (.71). Jurrjens excelled in this statistic last season (.53), too. Especially after Hudson returns to the mound, there shouldn't be many balls leaving the park against this starting staff.

Although Kenshin Kawakami had impressive numbers in Japan, he faces a tough adjustment to the major leagues. Some Japanese starters have successfully made the transition, while others have struggled.

Nine Japanese-born pitchers have started 10 or more major league games. Two of them – Mac Suzuki and Tomo Ohka – came up through the minor leagues and therefore never faced this situation. That leaves Hideo Nomo, Daisuke Matsuzaka, Masato Yoshii, Kazuhisa Ishii, Hideki Irabu, Hiroki Kuroda and Kei Igawa. Those seven pitchers have combined for a 272-254 record and 4.41 ERA during their big league careers.

Kawakami's last three seasons in Japan compare favorably to those of the other seven starters before they came to America. His 2.81 ERA trailed only Matsuzaka (2.40) and Irabu (2.68). While his 38 victories ranked fifth, the leader, Nomo, topped him by just five wins. And his .655 winning percentage led the group. Kawakami ranked sixth among the eight pitchers with 8.12 strikeouts per nine innings. But he showed the sharpest control, walking 1.57 batters per nine innings.

Most of these pitchers came to the United States at a much younger age than Kawakami, who turns 34 in June. Nomo and Matsuzaka, who became the best big league starters of the group, made the move in their mid-20s.

Among the others, only Kuroda (33) and Yoshii (32) made their major league debuts in their 30s. Yoshii had limited success here, going 32-47 with a 4.62 ERA. He pitched well in his first two years (18-16, 4.17 ERA), before tailing off.

Kawakami and Kuroda had similar statistics during their last three seasons in Japan, with the new Braves righthander striking out more batters per nine innings. Kuroda turned in a solid first year with the Dodgers in 2008, going 9-10 with a 3.73 ERA.

With his wife, Billye, watching, Hank Aaron acccepts a Steuben Glass bat from Jay Schottenstein, a principal owner in the Schottenstein Stores Corporation.

MONSTER BASH!

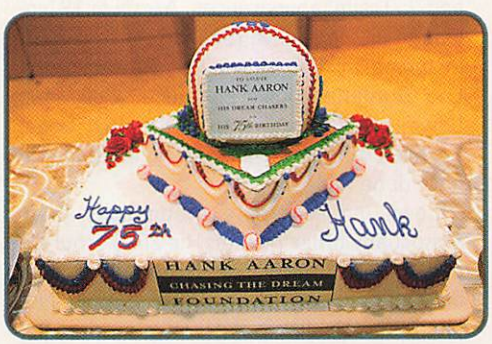
AARON'S BIRTHDAY PARTY IS FIT FOR A KING'S NEW RECORD: 1,577 (HOME RUNS PLUS DREAMS CHASED)

PHOTOS BY ALLISON SHIRREFS

BY PATTY RASMUSSEN

FOR ONCE, THE GREAT HOME RUN HITTER was rather helpless. Mighty Henry had no choice but to sit and take called strike after called strike at his 75th Birthday Gala.

It might have been, paraphrasing pitcher Curt Simmons, "harder to throw a fastball by Henry Aaron than to sneak a sunrise past a rooster," but Hammerin' Hank failed to foul off even a single one of the tide of accolades tossed his way during this grand celebration of his life and accomplishments.



Despite Aaron's efforts to redirect the spotlight to his successful Chasing the Dream Foundation, he simply couldn't escape the overwhelming testimonials that poured in at the February 5 bash attended by some 700 at the Marriott Marquis hotel in downtown Atlanta, just 3 miles from where he hit historic home run No. 715 on April 8, 1974.

Aaron was toasted by two former U.S. presidents - Bill Clinton who was in attendance, and Jimmy Carter, who was unable to attend but sent a message.

He was honored by Wisconsin governor Jim Doyle, former New York governor Mario Cuomo, sports broadcaster Bob Costas, baseball commissioner Bud Selig, Braves chairman emeritus Bill Bartholomay, and former United Nations ambassador Andrew Young, who called Aaron the, "quintessential American athlete," in his remarks.

There were special salutes from Roxanne Spillett, president and CEO of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Tom Johnson the retired chairman of CNN, Ted Turner, the former owner of the Braves, Turner Broadcasting, and CNN, and a special taped message from NBC broadcaster Tom Brokaw.

The Atrium Ballroom at the Marriott Marquis was jam-packed for the splashy tribute to Aaron that was conceived and orchestrated by his wife of 35 years, Billye Aaron. Everyone wanted to have their say about Aaron, still considered by many to be the true all-time home run record holder, even though his 755 total was eclipsed by 7 in 2007.

Billye was visibly moved during her closing remarks at the end of the evening.

"I can only say two words, thank you, thank you, thank you," she said, blinking back tears. "It is gratifying to know that so many of you would choose to be here with us on this occasion."

Billye said she purposely tried to keep the guest list relatively short, 300 to 400 people, but that she was flooded with requests from people who wanted to be part of the occasion. She felt she

could hardly say no, since the evening's proceeds benefited the Foundation.

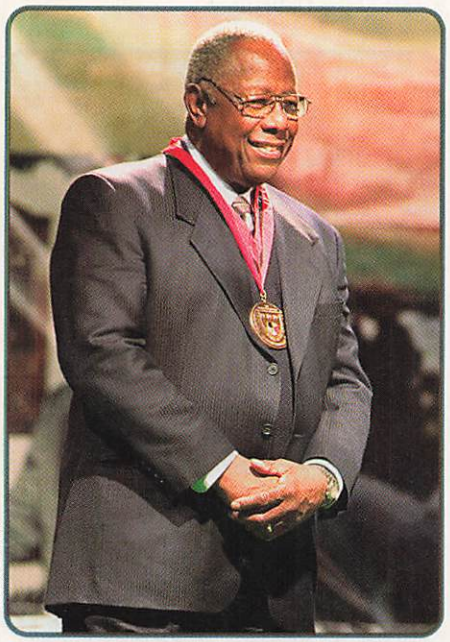
"And we were thrilled that so many of our 'Dream Chasers' could be with us tonight," she added, referring to the youths who have received grants from the Foundation.

A special VIP cocktail reception started the event, during which guests lined up to have their picture taken with the Aarons.

"Now I know (Hank) as a director of an important corporation," said Cuomo, who sits with Aaron on the board of the Medallion Financial Corporation, "but I remember him as a great athlete who happened to be African American whose skills were literally untouchable. You can talk about his hitting, but he was a great baseball player and a great fielder, but most of all he was impeccable. He never sinned publicly and never said a word that was disproportionate to the moment. He was a super athlete, yes, but he is a great person, a great sports personality."

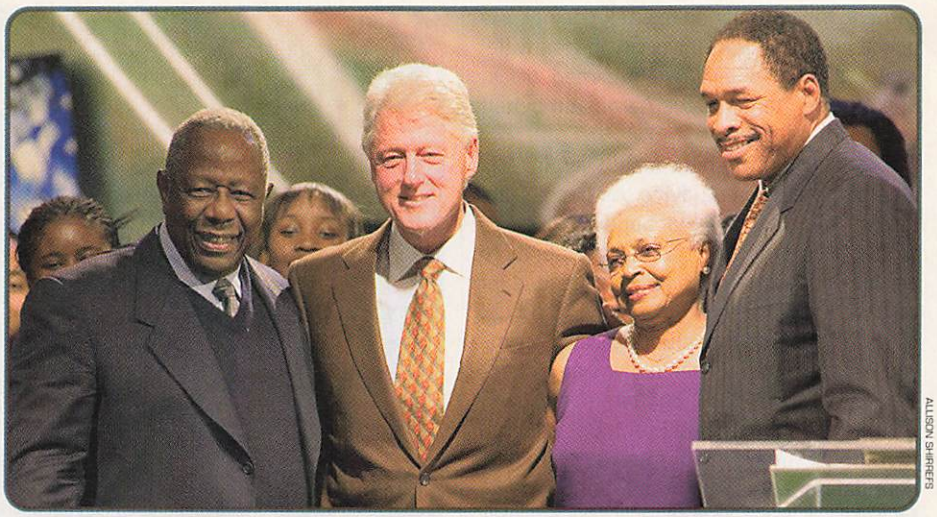
The cocktail reception was supposed to last an hour but ran over to the point that even easy-going Billye finally interrupted her husband, who was speaking to a group of reporters, with a firm, "Henry, I'm sorry but we've got to go."

Meanwhile, guests had taken their seats in front of a stage, decorated with baseballs and a fabulous mural of Aaron photos, flanked by two huge video screens. Hall of Fame outfielder Dave Winfield served as the master of ceremonies. After the obligatory thank yous to members of the planning committee and a lengthy list of corporate sponsors, Marcelo Neal, a "Dream Chaser" from Ironwood, N.Y., sang "The Lord's Prayer" as the invocation.



ALLISON SHIRRERS

Aaron proudly displays the special medal he received from Harvard University in recognition of his philanthropic work.



ALLISON SHIRRERS

Hank and Billye Aaron pose with former president Bill Clinton and Hall of Famer Dave Winfield, who served as master of ceremonies at the birthday bash.

Next up was a video tribute from veteran journalist Tom Brokaw, who developed a friendship with Aaron in 1973, while the slugger closed on Babe Ruth's all-time home run record. When Aaron finished that season with 713 home runs, two shy of breaking the record, the documentary became, "The Long Winter of Henry Aaron," originally shown on NBC in October 1973 and since re-broadcast on ESPN.

In his remarks, Brokaw, a highly regarded, Emmy award winning broadcaster, called the time spent with Aaron as "one of the journalistic highlights of my life." In addition to sharing clips from the original documentary, Brokaw recalled how he broke through Aaron's well-known reserve to forge their relationship.

"I was told that Henry read the paper every Sunday before the game," said Brokaw. "I brought a copy of the Sunday New York Times and an armful of other newspapers and got to the clubhouse before he did.

"When Henry arrived, I was sitting on a bench, handed him the New York Times, and we sat together, silently reading the papers. At the end of an hour, we had formed an unusual bond between a reporter and a sports hero. That led to a unique, insightful interview with this very gifted man."

Speaker after speaker echoed the words "humility... intelligence... respect" in describing Aaron. It wasn't just his baseball exploits that were extolled. Aaron's business acumen as owner of restaurants, car dealerships and other interests, was equally praised.

"He moved from the athletic field to the business field with equal grace," said Bartholomay, the successful insurance executive who was part of the consortium who bought the Milwaukee Braves in 1962 and then moved the team to Atlanta in 1966. "Hank's people skills are dead on," Bartholomay continued. "He's got great judgment when it comes to people. He proved that as head of our farm system, but he's used that same skill in business."

Sylvia Anderson, the president of AT&T Georgia, described Aaron as someone who not only broke barriers but someone who continued to give back to the community, long after he could have retired and moved on.

"You have to respect that type of commitment," she continued. "He's the type of person you root for!"

And then there's Aaron's foundation. The Hank Aaron Chasing the Dream Foundation was formed by the Aarons in 1994 with the goal of giving grants to 755 children between the ages of 9 and 12. Rather than focusing on large gifts, the Foundation filled in the gaps with grants ranging from $500 to $2,500, giving children the opportunity to chase their dreams, whether in sports, the arts, education or science. Sometimes a grant purchased a musical instrument, or money for extra classes, tutors or coaches in a given field.

Many of the now 822 "Dream Chasers," as the recipients are called, have grown up and gone to college, numerous continuing on the path of their original dream. Others, whose horizons were expanded by that first taste of accomplishment, are pursuing new dreams. Quiana Lewis, who originally

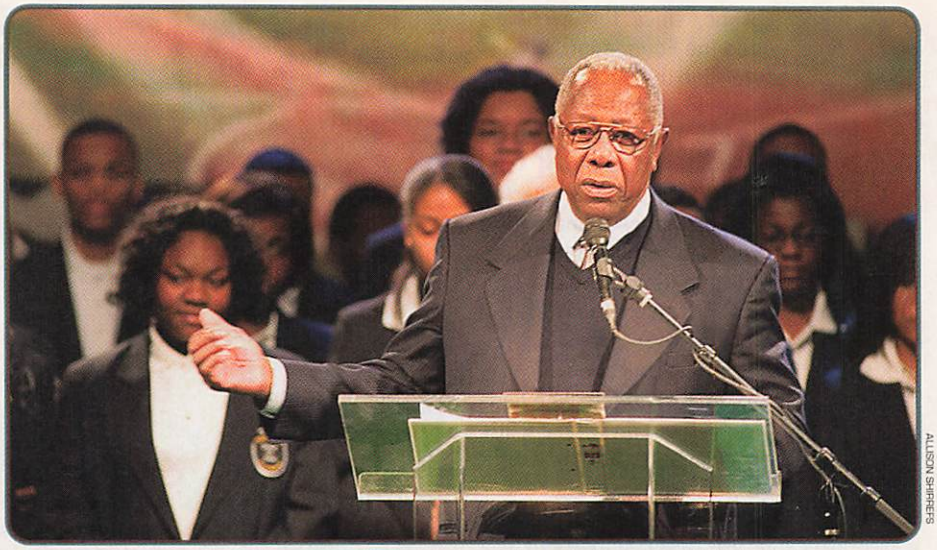
CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

came to the Foundation to study the harp, is now a junior at Fisk University in Nashville, where she is following a pre-med track. She offered thanks to the Aarons on behalf of the Dream Chasers.

"Not only did you believe, but you invested in my dream of studying the harp," said Lewis. "You also gave that hope to 821 other students like me. You gave us the ability to be life-long dream chasers. Because of you, we know there is nothing we can't do. Your 755 home runs, plus the 822 dreams you've launched has caused your numbers to rise to 1,577 - and it continues to grow!"

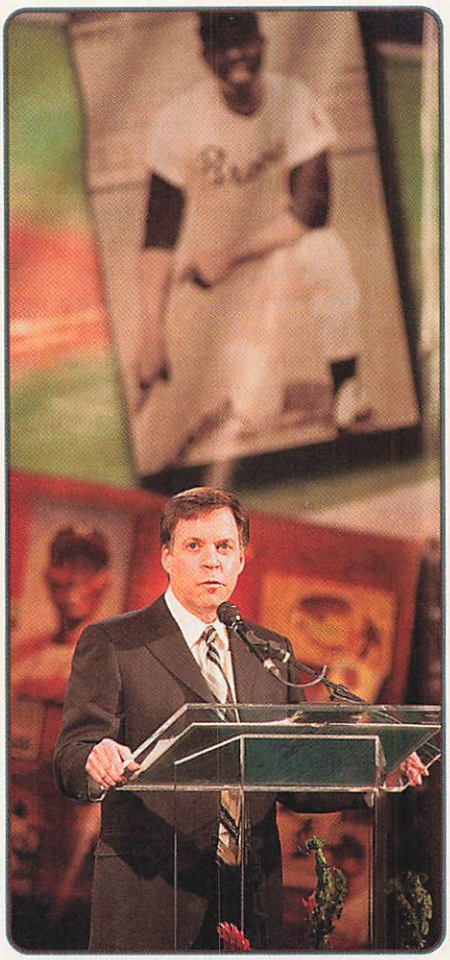
Allen Tanenbaum and Frank Belatti, both founding board members of the Foundation, announced the creation of "44 Forever," a fund named in Aaron's honor after his uniform number and endowed by a $2.5 million gift from Major League Baseball to be administered by the Boys & Girls Clubs of America. Funds from "44 Forever" will finance 44 youngsters' dreams each year in perpetuity.

"The number '44' is in honor of the man who launched so many dreams and will launch so many more," said Belatti. "He will be remembered, well, forever. For as long as there is a number 44, children will be able to chase their dreams in the name of Henry Aaron."



ALLISON SHIRRERS

Aaron acknowledges some of the 822 "Dream Chasers" he has helped pursue their goals with grants from his Chasing The Dream Foundation.



ALLISON SHIRRERS

Sportscaster Bob Costas was among those who spoke about Aaron.

The board also announced a special stipend of $1,755 to each of the collegiate Dream Chasers, which was followed by a classical piano performance by Kennon Ward, a sophomore music major at Columbia College in Chicago.

After a dinner of shrimp, chicken and filet mignon, the crowd enjoyed a performance by Grammy Award winning jazz guitarist Earl Klugh, and then heard from Ted Turner, who recalled offering Aaron the job of running the Braves farm system in 1976.

"We worked together for 30 years and never had a cross moment," said Turner. "The only thing we disagreed with, a little bit, was when we met with (Braves Hall of Fame scout and administrator) Paul Snyder to discuss whether to renew the manager's contract. Each time, Henry and I voted to let go of both Bobby Cox and Joe Torre. We fired two of the most successful managers in baseball history! Fortunately, we hired Bobby Cox back, and the rest is Braves history!"

Bob Costas shared the memory of sitting with his friends at Syracuse University, watching Aaron break Ruth's record, and afterward sending Aaron a congratulatory telegram.

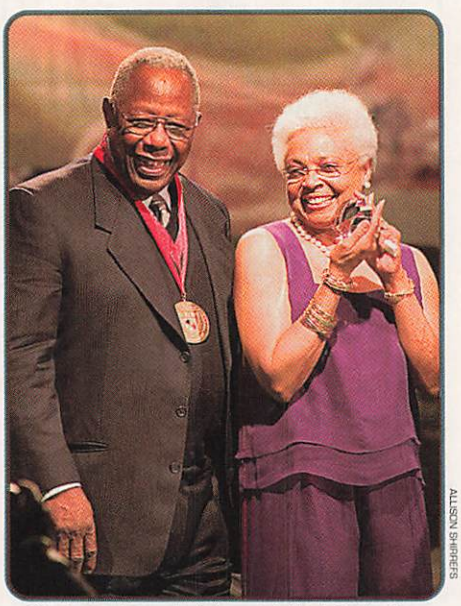
"Henry may not have realized it at the time," said Costas, "but many of us coming up were on his side."

Costas choked up when reciting legendary Dodgers broadcaster Vin Scully's famous call of that home run, "What a beautiful moment. What a sweet, beautiful moment for Henry Aaron, and for the country. A black man receiving a standing ovation in the Deep South for having broken the record of an all-time baseball idol."

Bud Selig, an Aaron fan, friend, and associate for 51 years, described him as the same quiet, thoughtful person he met in 1958.

"He broke the most important American sports record," said Selig. "He had a meteoric career and never really changed."

Aaron was presented with a framed photo of the Delta Airlines Boeing 757, "Hank Aaron 755," from Ed Bastian, president and chief financial officer of Delta Airlines. The jet, dedicated in June 2007 is adorned with a mural of Aaron and remains a part of the Delta fleet.



ALLISON SHIRRERS

Billye Aaron, who conceived the event, holds the Steuben Glass heart she received and shares a moment with the guest of honor.

Aaron also received a special medal in recognition of his philanthropic work from Harvard University, presented by Dr. S. Allen Counter, professor of neurology at Harvard and director of the Harvard Foundation.

Jay Schottenstein, a principal owner in the Schottenstein Stores Corporation, which also owns Steuben Glass, presented Aaron with a unique Steuben Glass bat, made in conjunction with Louisville Slugger. "Hank," said Schottenstein, "if you use this bat, you will break it!"

Schottenstein then presented a specially created Steuben glass heart to Billye Aaron.

At last, Bill Clinton took the microphone. He recalled coming to Georgia in 1992 when we was running for president to make a last-minute campaign stop and told his advisors, "I don't care if I carry Georgia if I get to meet Hank Aaron!"

Clinton spoke of Aaron's selflessness.

"He's always thinking about his kids and his foundation," said Clinton. "The first thing he said when I sat down was, 'I've heard your (Presidential) library is really good. I want to get some of my kids there. I think it will help them chase their dreams. Can you set it up?'

"Probably not a single kid they help through their foundation will end up in the Baseball Hall of Fame, but they all have their dreams and all have a chance at them," Clinton continued. "He's teaching them to find some way to swing for the fences. That consistency, conviction and commitment count for something."

Though Clinton is considered an outstanding orator, it was Billye Aaron who brought down the house, serenading her husband with her rendition of, "Happy Birthday" - a breathy homage to Marilyn Monroe! After she sang, "Happy Birthday... my darling... Happy Birthday to you," the crowd roared their approval as Billye planted an affectionate kiss on her husband's lips.

Aaron's humility was in full force when he thanked the guests for their attendance, calling the evening, "A celebration to show that we care about the kids. I'm gratified that so many of my friends from all over the world would choose to be here on this special day."

Former Braves outfielder Brian Jordan spoke for many of the guests when he said, "There aren't too many guys in the game who are so great and humble at the same time. I have nothing but good things to say about Hank. He's a true legend who went about doing everything the right way - on the field and off."

FIELDING MY POSITION IS WHAT I EMPHASIZE

I AM VERY COMFORTABLE in the backup catcher's role. I definitely knew I was coming to Atlanta to be a backup guy, and that's easy to take when you know the guy in front of you is as good as Brian McCann is. I know from playing against him that he's a good player, and I've heard good stuff about him.

My main concern this off-season was taking care of my family and going somewhere I felt we could win. I know my family will like Atlanta, and I believe this team is going to have a chance to win.

I'd say the strength of my game is the emphasis I place on defense. It's probably the biggest thing I bring to the table. Catching, throwing, calling a game - those areas are so important. I can hit, but I don't like to toot my own horn.

This team is going through a transition. It's going to be interesting, because I've never considered myself a veteran. But people have said things like I'll be a "veteran presence." It's funny to me, since I've never seen myself that way. But with my experience (seven seasons in the majors), it's true.

I've been on winning teams, and I've been on losing teams. Every winning team has a mix of veteran and young players. The mix is important, and so is the way that everyone gets along.

I've always heard that Bobby Cox does things the right way and has respect for his players. I'm anxious to play for him. I'm anxious to offer any little bit of knowledge I have, to root for my teammates, and win games. Winning solves everything.

I was born in Bainbridge, Georgia, but I grew up in Tallahassee, Florida. My mom worked at Florida State University when I was getting ready to go to college, so I decided I needed to get out of town and go somewhere else. I ended up at Auburn University, in Alabama.

> "I'M ANXIOUS TO OFFER ANY LITTLE BIT OF KNOWLEDGE I HAVE, TO ROOT FOR MY TEAMMATES, AND WIN GAMES."

I was a freshman and Tim Hudson had just transferred from a junior college. So I've known Huddy a long time. He's a great guy. He was a stud player who could hit and pitch. We were on the team that went to the College World Series.

I was at Auburn for two years and then transferred to the University of Florida. I went to the College World Series with that team, too. We actually had four guys, including me, who made it to the major leagues from that team - Mark Ellis who plays second base for Oakland, Josh Fogg (Reds) who's pitched for a bunch of teams, and Brad Wilkerson (Blue Jays).

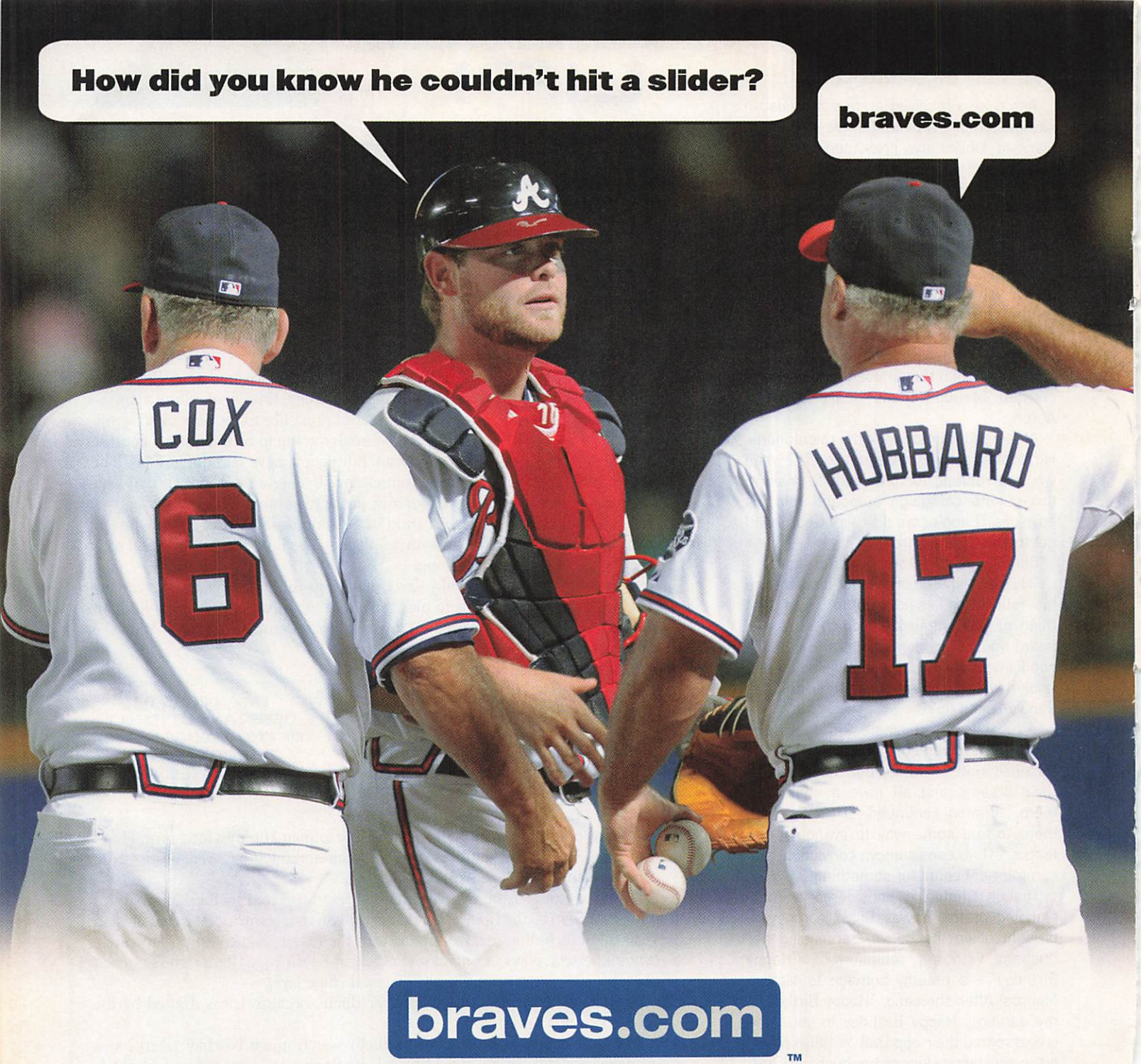
I went to two colleges but didn't graduate, because I was drafted by the Dodgers in my junior year.

It's kind of funny, but I didn't actually watch much baseball when I was growing up. When I did, it was the Atlanta Braves, so I watched guys like Dale Murphy, Glenn Hubbard and Terry Pendleton. It will be interesting to meet them and have Hubbard and Pendleton as coaches.

I didn't have a catcher role model, really. Pudge Rodriguez was the big name coming on when I was growing up, but I was usually outside trying to get up a game of baseball rather than watching it on television.

My dad took me to one of the (Braves') World Series games in the early '90s. I think it was the Braves and Toronto (1992). It was a blast. We were sitting up at the top of the stadium in left field. It was the first major league game I remember attending.

As a kid, I was always trying to get up a game in our neighborhood, and it didn't matter what - basketball, baseball or football. I played basketball and baseball. I gave up football before high school. Basketball is still probably my favorite sport. I love watching college basketball. I go to a lot of the ACC games at Florida State.



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CLEANUP SOLUTION?

According To Chipper, Francoeur Is Primed For A Major Comeback

BY MARK BOWMAN
OF MLB.COM

As the Braves continue their search for an outfielder, they'd like to fill the need with a reliable power hitter who would bat in the middle of the lineup between Chipper Jones and Brian McCann.

But if they're feeling lucky and confident enough to take a gamble, Jones believes the Braves already possess the power-hitting right-handed batter to hit behind him and provide consistency in the cleanup spot.

"Frenchy is going to hit cleanup for us this year," Jones said with a sense of confidence.

When asked if he'd seen Jeff Francoeur (Frenchy) hit recently, Jones replied, "Yeah, and he looks better than I've ever seen him. His weight distribution, his approach, his mind-set... everything looks great. He's killing the ball right now."

What Francoeur has done over the past two months in a batting cage doesn't guarantee that he'll find success when he tests his new stance and approach against live pitchers in the heat of a game.

But the commitment to altering his approach and focusing on his baseball skills certainly puts Francoeur in a much better position than he was at this time last year, when he was better prepared for the National Football League's scouting combine than he was the start of spring training.

"I took a different approach last year going into [spring training], and it just ended up being a flop," Francoeur said. "I put too much weight on, and I didn't hit soon enough. I didn't throw soon enough. I think the first day I threw was the first day of spring training. Now I'm kind of going like I did in [2005 and '06]. I'm going [to camp] to make the team and be in shape for when the first day of games comes."

Motivated by the embarrassment of the .239 batting average and .359 slugging percentage that he compiled in 2008, Francoeur was determined to change. Instead of focusing on the weight-enhancing exercises that he hoped would increase his power last year, the 25-year-old outfielder maintained a more athletic frame and developed a new batting stance that he likens to the right-handed version of former Braves and current Yankees first baseman Mark Teixeira.

ATLANTA BRAVES

In an attempt to put the misery of 2008 behind him, Jeff Francoeur has refined his stance and approach at the plate and streamlined his body.

With his new stance, Francoeur points his left foot slightly inward. As he transfers his weight during his swing, there is minimal movement with his left foot.

"With my new stance and my new approach, I think I'm going to be able to see the ball a lot better," Francoeur said. "When you get the foot down, like everybody says, you're going to see the ball a lot longer and swing at better pitches.

"[McCann] said when he'd come to watch me in high school, I was always skinny and wiry-strong. So I've tried to get back to that, instead of being so big and just trying to hit home runs. I'm going to try to hit gap-to-gap this year."

More than anything, Francoeur is just looking to find the consistency that was absent last year. After his first 25 games, he was hitting .294 with three home runs and a .500 slugging percentage. In some ways, it looked like he'd picked up where he'd left off during the '07 season, when he produced a career-high .293 batting average with 19 homers and a .444 slugging percentage.

But over the course of his next 60 games, Francoeur hit .207 with five homers and an alarming .319 slugging percentage. This prolonged stretch led the Braves to send him to Double-A Mississippi for a weekend in early July.

Embarrassed and perturbed by the demotion, Francoeur didn't provide a lot of reason for encouragement after returning to the majors. But while hitting .245 with three homers and a .340 slugging percentage in his final 70 games, he gave himself reason to do whatever possible to avoid feeling similar frustration in the future.

"Last year was what it was," Francoeur said. "I struggled and I didn't know how to handle it, and I let it get in my head. I'm looking forward to getting back out there. Really, I think I'm going to be a different player than I was in [2006 and '07]. "I think the best thing for me was to get the season done and have some time in the off-season just to think about things and move on. I got my confidence back, and I'm looking forward to showing what I can do."

Just three years removed from playing for Team USA in the inaugural World Baseball Classic, Francoeur is still a ripe 25 years old and looking to prove what he can do at the major league level.

While hitting .260 during his first full big league season in 2006, he was encouraged by the fact that he hit 29 homers and recorded 103 RBIs. One season later, he totaled 19 homers and 105 RBIs while hitting .293.

The 2008 season was supposed to be one in which he meshed this power and consistency. But instead, it proved to be one that created doubts about his future.

"I just turned 25 (Jan. 8), and I feel like I have the prime of my career ahead of me," Francoeur said. "Most guys don't hit their peak until they're 27 or 28. I feel confident that I'm going to come back, do what I need to do, and help this team win, because I know I'm a big part of it."

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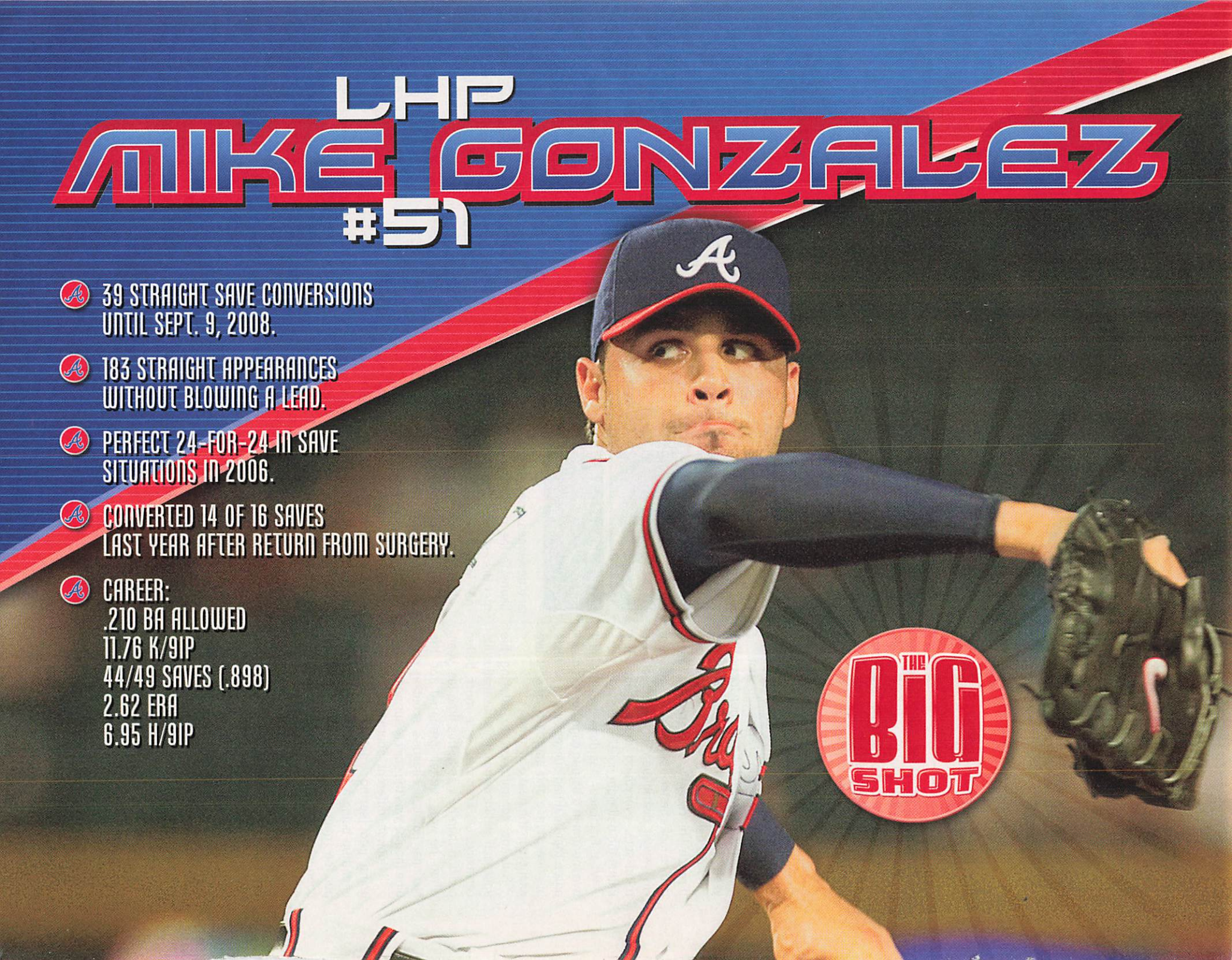
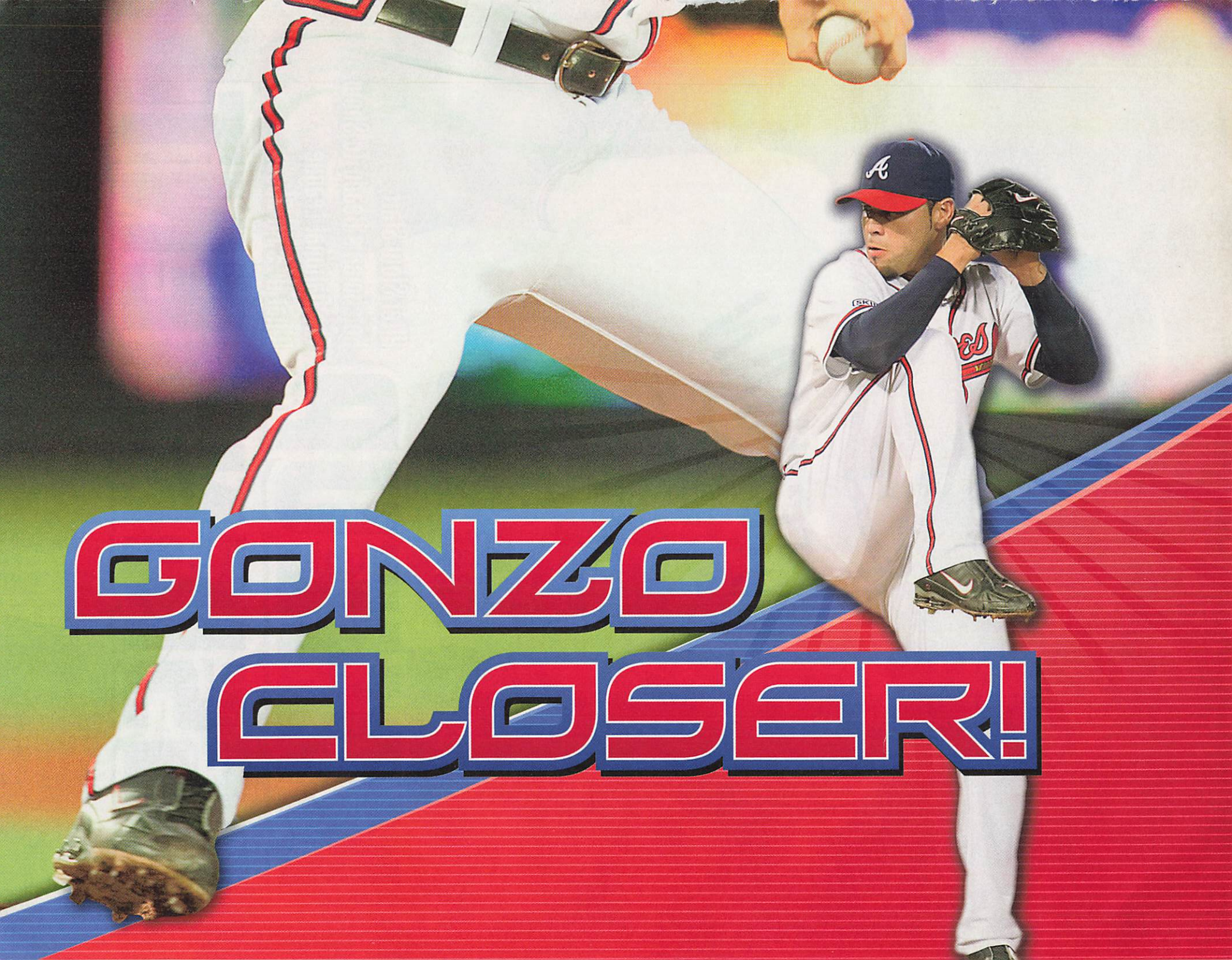
  44/49 SAVES (.898)
  2.62 ERA
  6.95 H/9IP

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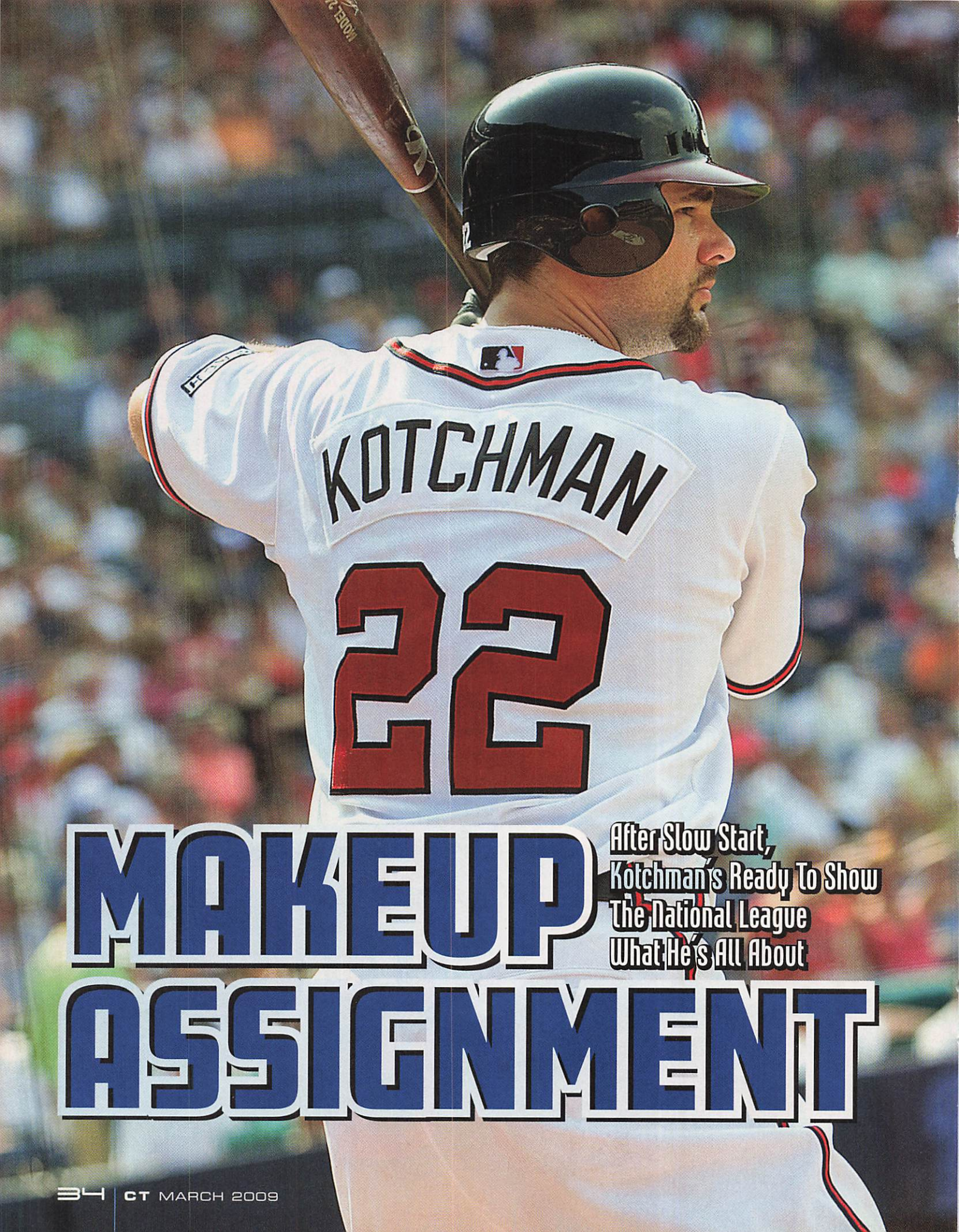


MAKEUP ASSIGNMENT

After Slow Start, Kotchman's Ready To Show The National League What He's All About

BY JON COOPER

Casey Kotchman won't tell you he's on a mission this season.

He'd rather show you.

That's true to form for the soft-spoken, 26-year-old native of St. Petersburg, Fla., acquired by the Braves from the Angels at last year's July 31 trade deadline, along with righty reliever Stephen Marek, in exchange for Mark Teixeira.

"It sometimes takes a little bit for him to open up, but trust me, he can talk and he's got a sense of humor," said his father, Tom Kotchman, manager of the Orem (Utah) Owlz, the Angels' representative in the Pioneer League (advanced rookie). "He never gets too high or too low, but don't mistake kindness for weakness. He's very intense in his own way when he's playing, and he's very focused."

Don't mistake his first 43 games in Atlanta for the real Casey Kotchman, either.

Having to replace Teixeira immediately put Kotchman behind the 8-ball. That 8-ball became a snowball that got bigger and bigger as he struggled at the plate, managing only three hits in his first 33 at-bats while trying to adjust to his new surroundings, a new league, and pitchers he'd never seen.

Then came the sobering phone call he received on the night of Aug. 19, when following a game against the New York Mets, he was told his mother was stricken with hemorrhaging in her brain that put her in neuro-intensive care. Kotchman went on the bereavement list and didn't play again until Sept. 2, when, as a pinch-hitter, he did something he rarely does - strike out (he whiffed only 39 times in 596 plate appearances, a 14.69 plate appearances per strikeout ratio that was third-best in the majors).

Casey Kotchman, with his father, Tom, mother, Susan, and sister, Christal, while attending the wedding of Minnesota Twins pitcher Boof Bonser this past November.

SPECIAL

ATLANTA BRAVES

ATLANTA BRAVES

Kotchman dismissed the trying circumstances when looking back on last season.

"I can't really say [the season] was all that difficult," he said. "We get to play baseball, and it's fun."

Getting to spend the holidays with his mother, who, he said is "doing great" but at one point, according to Tom, had only a 33 percent chance of survival, gave his spirits a lift and helped him re-focus.

"It gives a whole different meaning when something like that happens," he said of the ordeal. "Things get forced into perspective, and we're just fortunate to be able to play baseball. I'll get a fresh start, and I look forward to a successful season."

Kotchman has good reason to be optimistic about 2009. In September, once he rejoined the team and knew his mother had improved, Kotchman wielded the kind of hot bat that had him leading the first-place Angels in hits and RBIs (tied) at the time of the trade. Over the final month, he hit .305 with a .394 on-base percentage. He was second on the team with 15 RBIs and was fourth on the team in hits, runs and total bases.

Another positive is a new contract, a one-year, $2.885 million deal, that allowed him to avoid the potentially ugly process of arbitration, although he claims he never really let the business part of the game get to him.

"That hadn't even crossed my mind," he said. "That's [his agent] Casey Close's job. I just do my work, get ready for the season, and he takes care of the rest."

Finally, there's the comfort of being in Atlanta from Opening Day, and knowing his teammates and surroundings better.

"All the teammates from [Brian] McCann and [Jeff] Francoeur, Chipper [Jones] treated him great. They made him feel welcome," said Tom. "When he first came over, he didn't perform well, and he's not going to make excuses. You learn from that stuff."

Kotchman is eager to show what he learned from '08 and has his teammates and coaches anticipating it, as well.

"I look forward to him coming in, just relaxing," said hitting coach Terry Pendleton. "He's not coming in pressing to do well. I truly believe we're going to see the Casey Kotchman we traded for. He showed some signs late last year of doing what we expect him to do. I think we'll be pleased with what we have."

"I expect a big year out of him," added McCann. "He can hit. He gets a full season here and there are no distractions, he's going to help our team tremendously."

Count new ace Derek Lowe as another of Kotchman's admirers. When asked at AutographFest, if there was anyone he was glad to not have to face anymore as a Brave, he volunteered the following:

"I would say Casey Kotchman. He really

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ATLANTA BRAVES

TRUMPING THE ACES

For the Braves to beat division rivals Philadelphia and New York, they're going to have to get by their aces, Cole Hamels and Johan Santana, respectively.

Casey Kotchman will be a big help in doing that.

A career .288 hitter against lefthanders, Kotchman, who hit .303 against lefties in 2008, the fifth-best average in the majors among left-handed batters with at least 135 at-bats, has been especially potent against Hamels and Santana.

Here's how he's fared against the division rivals' top guns. Take particular notice of the power numbers against Hamels.

	AB	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS
Johan Santana	5	3	0	0	0	1	1	0	.600	.667	.600	1.267
Cole Hamels	9	4	0	0	3	4	0	1	.444	.444	1.444	1.889

hit me extremely well when he played for Anaheim, so it's good that he's on our team."

Among current Braves, Kotchman has a team-high .462 batting average against Lowe, with six hits, three RBIs (only Chipper Jones has more hits and RBIs), and a .615 slugging percentage. He has never struck out against him (the only Brave with at least 10 at-bats who can say that) and has one of his four career triples against him.

"A blind squirrel finds an acorn every once in a while," responded Kotchman with a laugh when asked about his success against Lowe. "I guess I've gotten lucky a couple of times off of him, found a couple of holes."

Lowe offered a different explanation.

"His swing has a low swing path, he's a low-ball hitter, and that's what I'm trying to do (keep the ball down)," said Lowe, who has limited the rest of the current Braves to a .265 average. "What makes all good hitters is being able to hit it to all fields, and I know he's done a great job of hitting off me, especially to left-center."

Pendleton also points to Kotchman's swing as the reason for his success.

"Every swing he leaves nothing there. He's turning it loose," said Pendleton. "It doesn't look under control, but it is under control. I like the fact that he gets himself in position to hit whether he's hitting the ball to left field, center field or right field. He gets himself in position to hit, and he turns it loose."

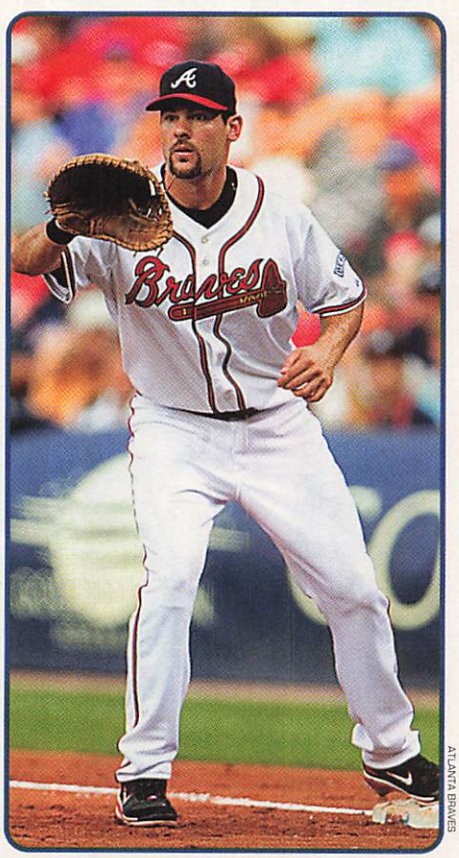
At first base, Kotchman is air-tight. A career .997 fielder, he had a .998 fielding percentage last season, tying Tampa Bay's Carlos Pena for the best in baseball. He committed only two errors - both on the June 20 at Philadelphia - in 1,303 total chances (Pena also committed two errors, but handled 204 fewer plays.). He was flawless in 390 chances with the Braves, never taking his hitting struggles into the field.

"My dad always told me, 'Your bat can't and won't be there every day, but your glove can and should be there every single day,'" he said. "You can help the team win games with your glove, and you certainly don't want to hurt the team with your glove."

Kotchman is ready to get the new season started and can hardly wait to get to spring training. Fortunately for him, he can get there in a hurry. Disney's Wide World of Sports complex in Kissimmee is only about two hours from where he grew up in St. Petersburg. He's looking forward to participating in his first spring training in his home state and is really looking forward to participating in his first camp under Bobby Cox.

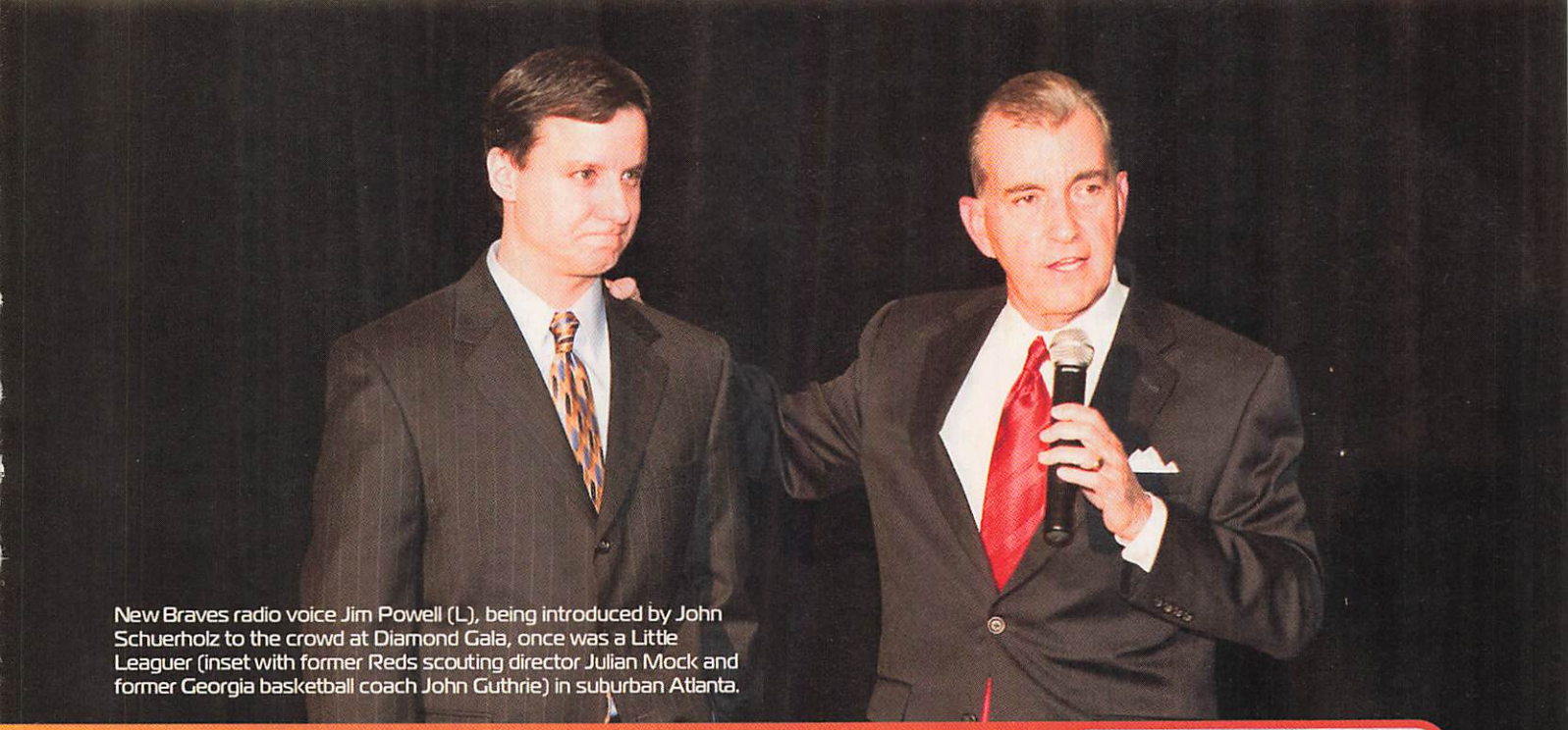
"Everybody, former and current players, say it's the best spring training that's ever been run, so I'm looking forward to that," he said. "I've done my work. I've prepped and primed myself. So, we'll just see what happens."

ATLANTA BRAVES



ATLANTA BRAVES

Strong at the plate and in the field, Kochman was a first-round draft pick of the Angels in 2001 (13th overall player taken) and at age 26, should just be entering the prime of his career.



New Braves radio voice Jim Powell (L), being introduced by John Schuerholz to the crowd at Diamond Gala, once was a Little Leaguer (inset with former Reds scouting director Julian Mock and former Georgia basketball coach John Guthrie) in suburban Atlanta.

DREAM JOB

Jim Powell Revisiting His Roots As Play-By-Play Voice Of New Radio Team

ATLANTA BRAVES; INSET: SPECIAL

BY BRIAN A. LEE

As a kid growing up in the Atlanta suburb of Roswell, Jim Powell would sit on his couch with his best friend watching Braves games with the sound down so he could provide his own call of the action taking place on the television screen.

When Powell and his family weren't attending their usual six to eight games a year at the old Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium, the young baseball fan could be found in his room at night with a transistor radio, his dreams and baseball knowledge growing with every game called by legendary broadcasters Ernie Johnson, Skip Caray and Pete Van Wieren.

Now Powell has been hired to replace the retiring Van Wieren in the radio booth for the 2009 Braves season.

"Of course, as a kid, this job was all I dreamed about," said the 44-year-old Powell, who handled radio play-by-play for the Milwaukee Brewers the past 13 years. "When I look back at my experiences since I became a professional, it's almost like I've been in training to be a Braves announcer the whole time. I got all that education on the Atlanta Braves when I grew up there and followed the team so closely. Then when I got to Milwaukee, it was almost like getting into a time machine.

"It never occurred to me [though] that Skip and Pete wouldn't be doing the games. I thought they'd do them forever. I was never really looking for the Braves job. It just wasn't something I was thinking about once I became older."

Powell will team with Hall of Famer and 18-year veteran of the Braves broadcast booth Don Sutton, who returns to Atlanta after a two-year stint covering the Washington Nationals.

Powell's passion for baseball was evident early in his life, both in his thoughts and actions. Stimulated by the sport, inspired by the legendary voices of the Braves broadcast booth, and encouraged by caring, supportive parents, he began devising his professional path at the age of 11 or 12.

"Here's the way the thought process evolved: No. 1, if you're going to have any job in the world, why not try to pick a really fun job?" Powell recalled. "That leads to No. 2: How do I get in free to baseball games? That was literally my motivation."

For Powell, being a baseball manager didn't seem all that attractive due to the high turnover rate, and sports writing seemed far too similar to English class.

"To get fired didn't seem like that much fun, and the whole sports writing thing didn't seem as appealing, because it was like you had to write an essay every night. As a kid, that was the bane of your existence - having to write end-of-quarter essays," he said. "The broadcasters just got to talk about the team, and when the game was over, they got to go home. They got to travel with the team, they got in free to all the games, and from my experience, they didn't get fired every couple of years just because the team was struggling."

From a simple plan came a long and sometimes winding career path for Powell, who started it in high school with an internship in the newsroom and sports office at WGST-AM. From there, it was on to Athens and the University of Georgia, where he

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

worked at WRFC and handled play-by-play duties for the Bulldogs baseball team in 1985-1986. Working his way up and paying his dues in the broadcasting profession often meant changing residences, as well as sports.

"It wasn't as easy as just declaring yourself a baseball broadcaster," he said. "I did a lot of other jobs. I always felt it was like becoming a pilot - you have to log a certain amount of air time or flight time so that you have things happen to you, mistakes happen and situations arise, and you learn how to deal with them before you're actually able to be a pilot yourself, or - in this case - a broadcaster."

Powell's collegiate broadcasting experience included handling play-by-play duties for the University of South Carolina baseball program in 1989 and 1994, Davidson College basketball in 1990, and South Carolina's football and basketball games from 1993-1995. He also led CBS Radio broadcasts for several college football games, including the 1997 Sun Bowl.

Powell accumulated extensive professional baseball broadcasting experience in the minor leagues as play-by-play announcer for the Columbia Mets (1987-89, 1993-94) and the Charlotte Knights (1990-91, 1995). After beginning his major league broadcasting career with the Minnesota Twins in a reserve role in 1993-1994, Powell joined the Milwaukee Brewers' broadcast team in 1996, beginning 13 seasons of working with legendary partner Bob Uecker. Along the way, Powell was named the 1998 Wisconsin Sportscaster of the Year and spent time as a member of the Brewers television team during the 1999 and 2000 seasons.

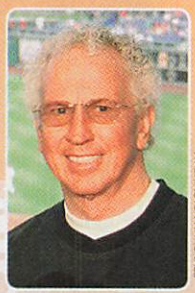
From city to city and one venue to another, Powell has racked up a lot of miles in his more than 20-year broadcasting career. To be sure, there were plenty of bumps in the road along the way. When working his first game for the Charlotte Knights, Powell was preparing for a 7 p.m. first pitch. The problem was, the game started at 1p.m. and he lived in Columbia, South Carolina, at the time.

"So, I made that hour-and-10-minute drive in about 35 minutes and then got up [to Charlotte] and got stuck in traffic," Powell said. "Talk about looking disheveled. That's the nightmare scenario for a broadcaster, having the wrong time or being late to a game."

As play-by-play announcer for the Columbia Mets, Powell once called an entire doubleheader against the Augusta Pirates by telephone.

SUTTON RETURNS

Don Sutton, a Braves broadcaster for 18 seasons (1989-2006), will be back in the booth this year after spending two seasons working Washington Nationals games. He'll be paired on Braves radio with newcomer Jim Powell, and together they replace the late Skip Caray and recently retired Pete Van Wieren.



WASHINGTON NATIONALS

A member of the National Baseball Hall of Fame, Sutton won 324 games pitching in 23 big league seasons (1966-88) and was a four-time All-Star.

"When you're working in the minor leagues, you're your own engineer, producer and play-by-play man," he said. "That night the equipment was down, and it was about 106 degrees with humidity, as always, at 99 percent. I was sitting there with that phone pressed against my face for a long time. That was a long day."

Before Heisman Trophy winner and popular dual-sports star Bo Jackson was breaking long touchdown runs for the Oakland Raiders and running down balls and up walls for the Kansas City Royals, he was turning many a head in college. Powell got to describe one such moment when Jackson's Auburn Tigers paid a visit to the University of Georgia in one of the first night baseball games ever played at Foley Field in Athens.

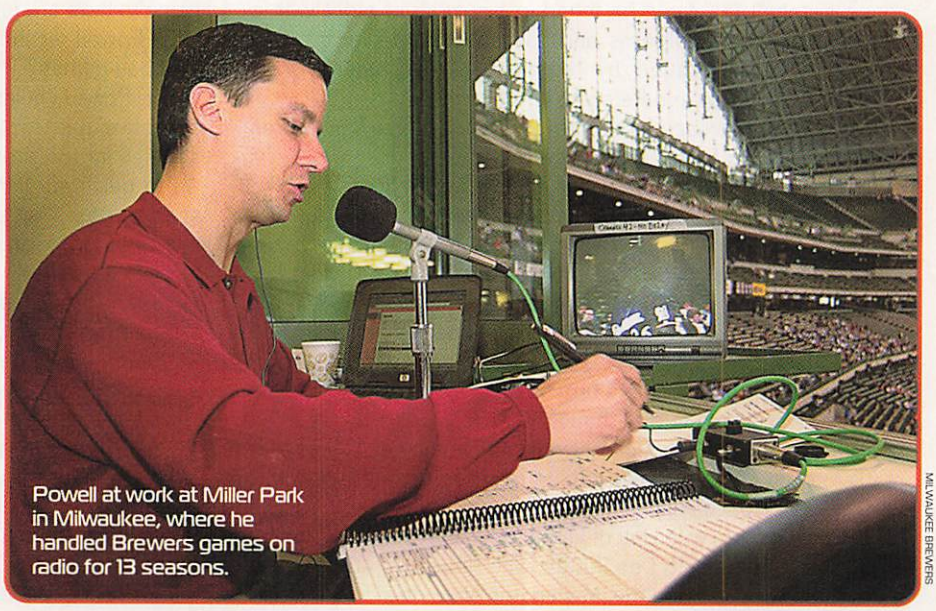
"Bo Jackson hit a ball into left-center field that was still rising when it crashed into the new lights," said Powell. "You can imagine Bo Jackson with an aluminum bat and the third baseman [wishing he could be] lining up with his back against the left-field fence. That would've been like a 9,000-foot home run, as far as I can tell. I've never seen anything like that in my entire life."

Realizing his childhood dream and making a glorious homecoming to Atlanta where he's the toast of Braves-loving family and friends is about as good as it gets, says Powell.

"It's been unbelievably exciting," he said. "I can't imagine where anybody in broadcasting wouldn't be interested in giving up their job and going to Atlanta. It's the largest radio network in all of sports. You have over 1 million listeners every night. It's just been unbelievable, and still I don't think it has really sunk in yet totally. It's really humbling and more than a little bit surreal."

Powell, who carries around a baseball card of 1970s Braves outfielder Rowland Office as a good-luck charm and "little key to my childhood," knows he's fortunate to have worked with great broadcasters in the past and to continue that trend in his hometown. Uecker not only provided great professional advice for Powell, but he also was a living connection from Atlanta, where he played briefly (1967), to Milwaukee, where the Braves once played and still have a strong historical connection.

"I think the number-one lesson that I



Powell at work at Miller Park in Milwaukee, where he handled Brewers games on radio for 13 seasons.

MILWAUKEE BREWERS

learned from him is that it's just a game," said Powell. "Be prepared, be ready, but just call the game. That can be a difficult lesson for a young broadcaster who's trying to prove that he belongs. You feel like you need to really put a lot of stuff in there to prove how smart you are, how prepared you are. In the end, Bob taught me that less is more. Relax and have a good time - that's what the listeners want. They're enjoying a baseball game."

Powell already knows his new partner in the Braves broadcast booth through Sutton's friendship with Uecker and because Sutton's son, Darren, worked as a Brewers TV announcer.

"My reaction is that it couldn't be a better choice," Powell said. "From everything I would look for in a partner, Don's got it all. He's got the automatic credentials of being a Hall of Famer, he's a great guy, and his reputation of being a prepared broadcaster and his ease of working with partners are sterling."

But it all started for Powell back in his childhood when Johnson, Caray and Van Wieren brought his favorite sport to life through words and inspired his professional dream, which has remarkably come true.

"I learned a large portion of the baseball that I know today from the descriptions and lessons that those three guys gave over the radio," said Powell. "I always felt they did a very good job of talking to both the most ardent of baseball fans, as well as the people like me who didn't know what an infield fly rule was or needed an occasional description of what hit-and-run meant or drag bunt. The hardest part early was learning to be yourself. There certainly was a tendency back then for me to try to be Skip Caray or Pete Van Wieren or (University of Georgia's) Larry Munson."

"I still feel like every year I'm getting better at being a broadcaster. I think I had my best broadcasting year ever in 2008 working for the Brewers, and I'm excited about the challenge of working for the Braves. I definitely believe my best work is ahead of me. There's no way that the broadcast is going to sound like it used to. I know for a lot of fans it will be really hard to get past that, but with Don there, we have a familiar voice. My voice is not as familiar to the fans in Atlanta, but maybe they'll be a little more accepting of the new sound of the broadcast because of the presence of Don Sutton."

Transition or not, it'll be hard for Braves fans not to embrace one of their own returning home to fulfill a childhood dream.

SAN DIEGO STILL LIKELY TO UNLOAD JAKE PEAVY

THE PADRES' SALE to a group led by **Jeff Moorad** did not figure to change the team's position on trading righthander **Jake Peavy**. Club officials maintained that they only would trade Peavy if the deal made baseball sense. However, the team's season ticket sales have dropped from about 15,000 in 2008 to "well below" 10,000, according to the San Diego Union-Tribune. The increasing financial pressure might compel the Padres to move Peavy, particularly if they could land a package from the Cubs headed by minor-league third baseman **Josh Vitters**, a top hitting prospect.

The Brewers entered the off-season believing they might get four high draft picks if they lost **CC Sabathia** and **Ben Sheets** as free agents. Instead, they will get nothing for Sheets and only the Yankees' second-rounder and a supplemental pick for Sabathia. The Angels gained the Yankees' first-round pick because first baseman **Mark Teixeira** was a higher-rated free agent than Sabathia, according to the Elias player rankings. Draft-pick compensation is eliminated for free agents who sign after the June draft, and Sheets will now postpone his decision accordingly, due to elbow surgery.

The Dodgers were weighing a run at free-agent second baseman **Orlando Hudson**, but initially saw him only as an alternative to **Manny Ramirez**, in combination with **Adam Dunn**. The price for both Ramirez and Hudson, club officials believed, would be too high. Well, owner **Frank McCourt** recently bought a pair of beachfront homes in Malibu for $46 million. He couldn't afford both?

Former Braves righthander **Juan Cruz**, perhaps more than any other player, bore the burden of a Type A free agent who was offered salary arbitration. Teams were reluctant to lose a high pick for a middle-inning reliever – even one who had the highest strikeout rate (12.37 K/9IP) among National League relievers last season, ahead of even **Brad Lidge**, while pitching for the Diamondbacks.

Free-agent infielder **Nomar Garciaparra** spent considerable time trying to decide whether he was physically sound enough to play this season. The Phillies wanted to sign him as a right-handed hitting reserve. "He doesn't want to put himself in a position where we're relying on him and he's not going to be able to perform," said Phillies GM **Ruben Amaro Jr.**

Both the Phillies and Giants pursued infielder **Ty Wigginton**, who agreed to a two-year, $6 million free-agent contract with the Orioles. The Phillies actually were confident of landing Wigginton for the role they envisioned for Garciaparra. The Orioles, however, offered Wigginton a better deal and more playing time.

The Yankees' goal in trying to trade **Nick Swisher** or **Xavier Nady** is to recoup some of the prospects they lost in their respective trades for both players, according to rival executives. Nady and left-hander **Damaso Marte** cost the Yankees four prospects in their deal with the Pirates. Swisher arrived from the White Sox with a minor league pitcher in exchange for infielder **Wilson Betemit** and two minor league pitchers.

- KEN ROSENTHAL IS A SENIOR WRITER FOR FOXSPORTS.COM

Chipper Jones shows some fans how it's done at the craps table during the Atlanta Braves Foundation's inaugural Diamond Gala for charity Jan. 23 at the Intercontinental Hotel.

ATLANTA BRAVES

Fun N' Games

BRAVES PLAYERS, coaches, alumni and fans helped to raise more than $100,000, Jan. 23-24, at the Atlanta Braves Foundation's inaugural Diamond Gala and AutographFest. All proceeds will go back into the community through the Foundation's grants program that provides financial support to non-profit organizations.

The inaugural Diamond Gala was held Jan. 23 at the Intercontinental Hotel in the Buckhead section of Atlanta. Approximately 400 guests mingled with some of the Braves' biggest stars who dealt blackjack, spun the roulette wheel, and threw the dice at the craps table during the casino night that included silent and live auctions.

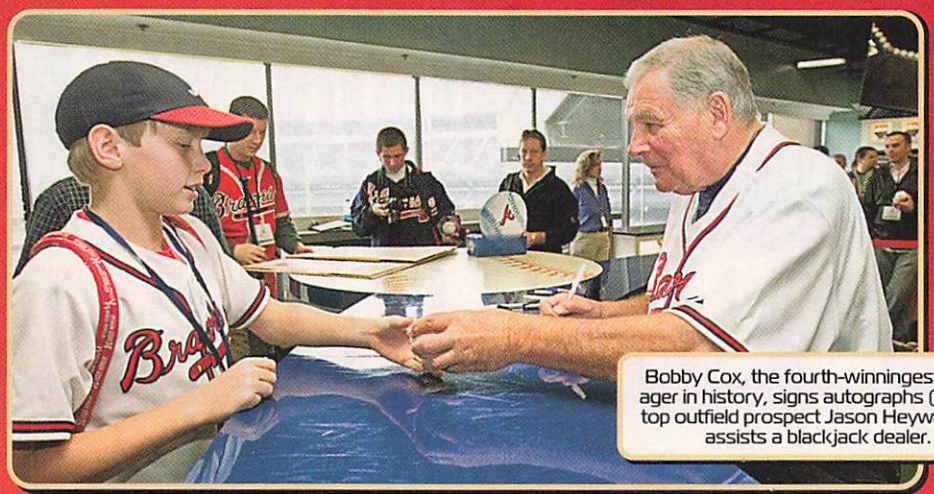
Those at the Diamond Gala included Hall of Famer Hank Aaron, Chipper and Sharon Jones, Brian and Ashley McCann, Tim and Kim Hudson, Derek and Carolyn Lowe, Matt and Leslee Diaz, Kelly and Lauren Johnson, Buddy Carlyle, Greg Norton, Casey Kotchman and fiancée Erin Krall, Blaine and Ginsey Boyer, Boone Logan, Brandon Jones, Jeff Ridgway and his wife, Kelli, top prospects Jordan Schafer and Jason Heyward, former Brave Brian Jordan, pitching coach Roger McDowell and his wife Gloria, and third base coach Brian Snitker and his wife Ronnie. Among front office representatives were Frank Wren and John Schuerholz and his wife, Karen.

Each guest was given a wooden box, engraved with the Atlanta Braves Foundation logo, that held a deck of Diamond Gala playing cards.

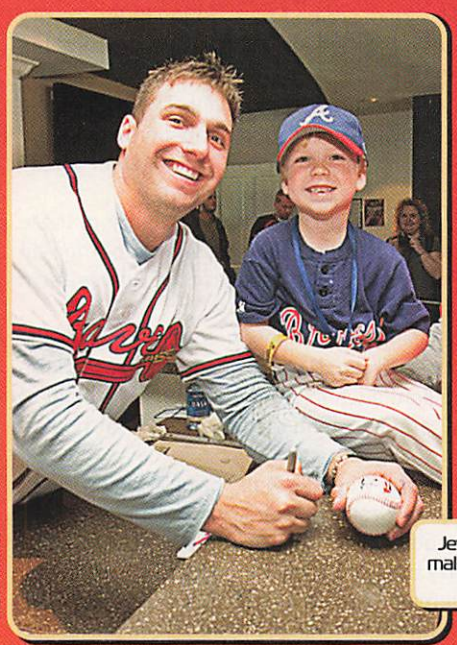
The next day at AutographFest, a $20 donation to the Atlanta Braves Foundation gave fans the chance to meet players and acquire autographs at Turner Field.

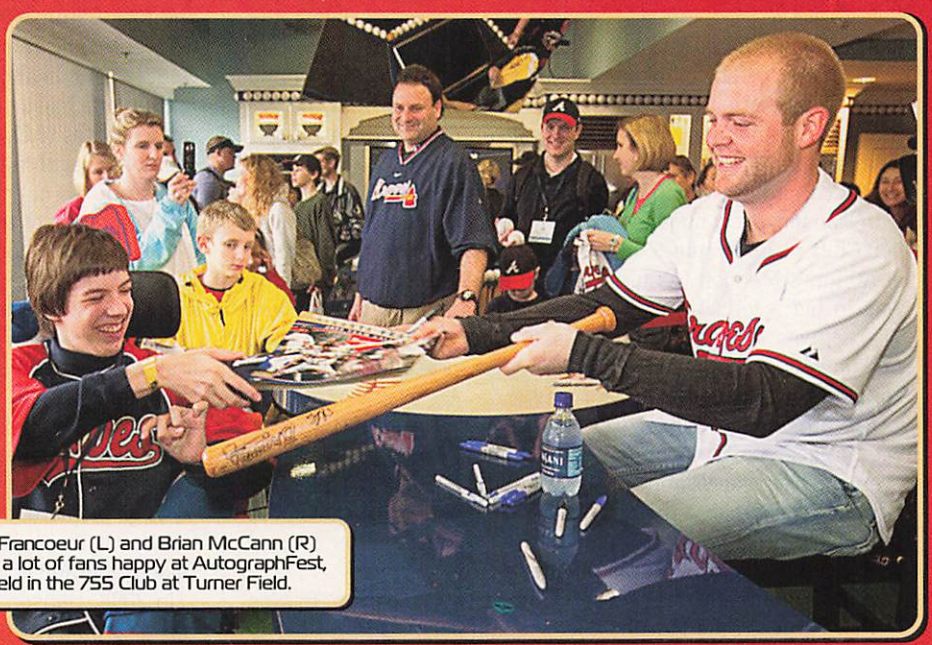
Players in attendance included McCann, Lowe, Hudson, Johnson, Jeff Francoeur, Josh Anderson, Kotchman, Jeff Bennett, Diaz, Norton, Boyer, Peter Moylan, Carlyle and prospects Tommy Hanson and Heyward. Also attending were Bobby Cox and coaches Terry Pendleton, Roger McDowell, Chino Cadahia and Brian Snitker, and Braves alumni including Hall of Famer Phil Niekro, Marquis Grissom, Pete Smith, Jay Howell and Brad Clontz.

New lefty reliever Boone Logan (L) shows off his silent auction prize, an acoustic guitar signed by Jimmy Buffett, and new staff ace Derek Lowe deals blackjack to some fans.

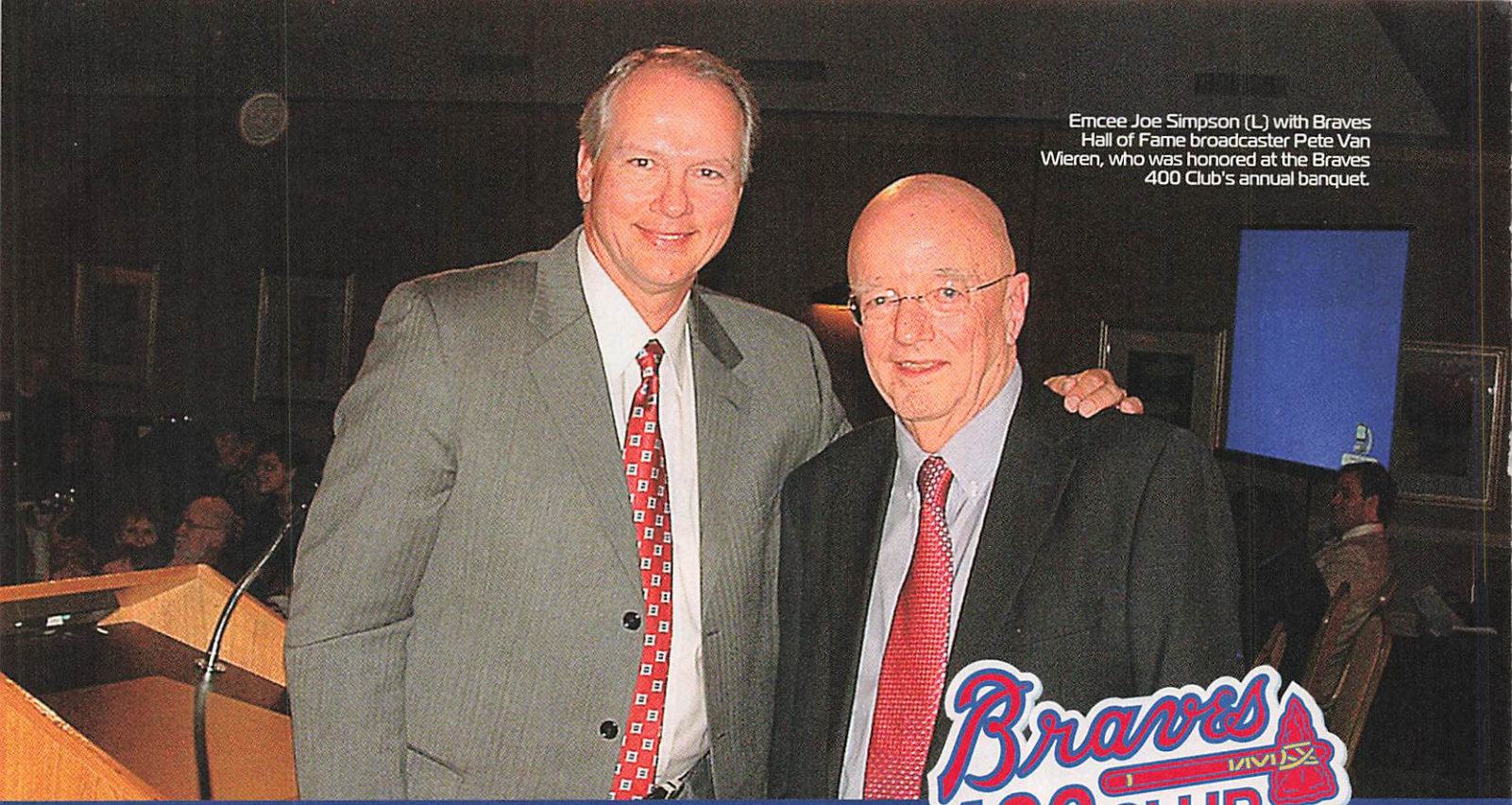


Bobby Cox, the fourth-winningest manager in history, signs autographs (L), and top outfield prospect Jason Heyward (R) assists a blackjack dealer.





Jeff Francoeur (L) and Brian McCann (R) make a lot of fans happy at AutographFest, held in the 755 Club at Turner Field.



Emcee Joe Simpson (L) with Braves Hall of Fame broadcaster Pete Van Wieren, who was honored at the Braves 400 Club's annual banquet.

Braves 400 CLUB

Skip & Pete, Aaron, Top Prospects Among Those Saluted At Annual Winter Banquet

EVENING OF HONORS

TOM MILLIN

BY JON COOPER

Tommy Hanson's 6-foot-6 frame makes it almost impossible not to look up to him.

But resourceful Hall of Famer Phil Niekro, who's 6-foot-1 and turns 70 on April 1, found a way to see eye-to-eye with the 22-year-old righthander who's the hottest commodity in the Braves' farm system: Stand on a chair.

Niekro's antics, which came while he was posing for a photo with Hanson, drew huge laughs from the audience at the Braves 400 Club's 43rd Annual Eddie Glennon Gameboree, held Jan. 31 at Atlanta's Marriott Century Center hotel. The evening's theme was to bid a fond farewell to legendary announcers Pete Van Wieren, who retired after the season, and the late Skip Caray. Additionally, several annual awards were presented, including some to Braves top prospects.

The atmosphere closely resembled that of a celebrity roast, with emcee Joe Simpson directing pointed, dry-witted barbs at everyone from Van Wieren, his favorite target, to late-arriving Otis Nixon, who compared trying to find the Marriott to Pascual Perez repeatedly circling I-285 in search of Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium in 1982.

Braves alumni in attendance included Niekro, Nixon, Braves Hall of Famers Dale Murphy and Ernie Johnson, Darrel Chaney and Rick Camp, who Niekro described as a "Bingo hitter - every time someone mentioned his career .074 average, teammates would stand up and yell, 'Bingo!'"

Everyone had a story on this bittersweet night. There were two video tributes to Caray and Van Wieren, and Simpson summed up everyone's sentiments by saying, "They worked together for 33 years, and it's not going to be the same ever again."

While much of the night was dedicated to reminiscing, there also was reason to look to the future. Hanson, winner of the Phil Niekro Award given to the outstanding pitcher in the Braves' farm system, best personifies that future.

A 22nd-round draft pick in 2005, Hanson is preparing for his first major league spring training. He was quite popular with the fans at the pre-dinner silent auction, but he also made a point of talking to Tim Hudson, and he mentioned a recent chat he had with Brian McCann.

"[McCann] was just saying when I get to spring training, don't try to go too hard, too quick," recalled Hanson. "He said everyone knows you have good stuff. Don't try to prove anything right away. Take it slow and don't try to do anything I'm not capable of doing."

In 2008, Hanson seemed capable of just about anything - he was a combined 11-5 with a 2.41 ERA in Myrtle Beach (advanced

A) and Mississippi (Double A), where he authored a no-hitter.

About the only thing he can't do is talk about himself. His acceptance speech lasted 13 seconds.

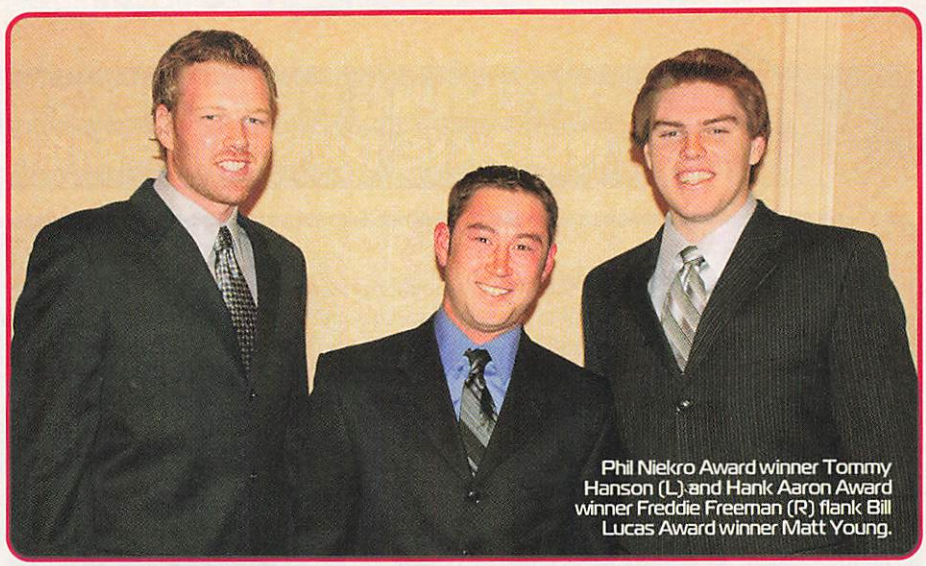
"To pitch, you have to be confident, but being humble, it's one of those things where, however good I am at baseball, it's not going to change my personality," said Hanson, who earlier in the day participated in the Braves' early throwing program at Turner Field. "I am who I am, baseball or not. It's just fun to hear my name around. I know who I am. It's not going to change me at all. I just want to pitch and do well and see what happens."

"I met his parents, and the apple didn't fall far from the tree," added Mississippi manager Phillip Wellman, recipient of the Minor League Manager of the Year for taking his team out of a 6-24 hole to a second-half championship and a league title.

"His dad and his mom did a great job of raising the young man to be humble. What you see is what you get. He's a great kid, very mature for his age. He handles himself well on the field and handles himself equally well off the field. I've been managing 12, 13 years, and there are very few Tommy Hansons that come along."

Outfielder Matt Young, who received the Bill Lucas Award as the Braves minor leaguer best exemplifying sportsmanship and character, was a teammate of Hanson's in Mississippi, as well as with the Mesa Solar Sox in the Arizona Fall League. He also was struck by Hanson's poise and mound presence.

"He's one of those guys that everybody's coming after," said Young. "But he always stayed under control, and he always controlled the game.



Phil Niekro Award winner Tommy Hanson (L) and Hank Aaron Award winner Freddie Freeman (R) flank Bill Lucas Award winner Matt Young.

CARLOS RESTREPO

"He's incredible," Young added. "You don't think somebody can one-up themselves, and he one-upped himself every start in Arizona. He was showing everybody what a big-league pitcher is supposed to be."

Hanson was the first pitcher to be named MVP of the Arizona Fall League after going 5-0 in seven starts, with a .063 ERA, never allowing more than three hits in a game, and striking out 49 in 28 2/3 innings. The Braves considered him "untouchable" in off-season trade talks, including those with San Diego for 2007 Cy Young winner Jake Peavy.

"It definitely makes me feel good about myself and about where I'm going as a pitcher," Hanson said. "I'm happy I can stay here."

Other winners during the evening included:

* First baseman Freddie Freeman, who took home the Hank Aaron Award, given to the organization's outstanding minor league hitter. The 19-year-old Freeman (.316 with 18 home runs and 95 RBIs at Class-A Rome) admitted, "As a California kid, I didn't really grow up rooting for the Braves. Sorry. But I want you to know how proud I am to put on a Braves uniform every day."

* Luke Appling Nostalgia Award winner James "Red" Moore. Moore, 91, was considered one of the greatest fielding first basemen in the history of the Negro Leagues.

* University of Georgia shortstop Gordon Beckham won the Jason Varitek Award as the most outstanding scholar/athlete in Georgia. Beckham, who was drafted by the Chicago White Sox, joked about being open to a future trade to Atlanta.

* Brookwood High School pitcher Chase Hawkins received the "Red Wooten" High School Player of the Year Award.

* Georgia Tech and the University of Georgia were recipients of Phil Niekro scholarships.

* Kim Hudson, wife of Tim and a relief-pitching columnist for ChopTalk, received the 400 Club's initial Special Recognition for Community Service.

* The final award was the Ivan Allen, Jr. "Mr. Baseball Award," which was given to Hank Aaron, who did not attend.

"He could not make it tonight, but we could no longer hold off presenting this award to this most deserving man," said Braves 400 Club co-president Wayne Coleman. Niekro accepted on Aaron's behalf.

"I am very proud and honored to accept this award for Henry," said Niekro, who then quipped, "I'm not going to take it to him. You're going to get it to him, aren't you?"

Joe Simpson and 400 Club co-president Wayne Coleman (center) present a special award for community service to Kim Hudson, Tim's wife.

TOM MILLIN

BY BILL BALLEW

PITCHING PROSPECTS EXPERIENCE ROOKIE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE from throughout the country headed for the nation's capital in mid-January to witness history with the inauguration of president-elect Barack Obama. Around that same time in nearby Vicksburg, Va., about 20 minutes south of Washington, 90 of baseball's top prospects representing all 30 major league teams gathered to discover as much about their future endeavors as possible during the annual Rookie Career Development Program.

Braves pitchers Stephen Marek, James Parr and Luis Valdez sat through nearly four days of lectures, role-playing, and small groups conducted by Major League Baseball. Many of the game's top officials, as well as several current and former major leaguers, including ex-Brave Bobby Bonilla (OF, 2000), offered advice, instruction and inside information on topics ranging from managing finances to clubhouse conduct.

"A lot of it was new information for me," said Marek, who joined the Braves in July after arriving from the Angels' organization in the Mark Teixeira trade. "Some of the drug program information was a little repetitive, but I learned a lot about the players union and how the pension works.

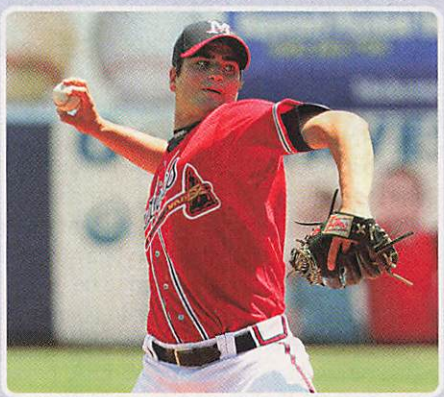
"There were current players and retired guys who gave us advice on how to act when we get to the big leagues. They talked about everything from the trainer's room to tipping clubhouse attendants to virtually anything else that we will face up there."

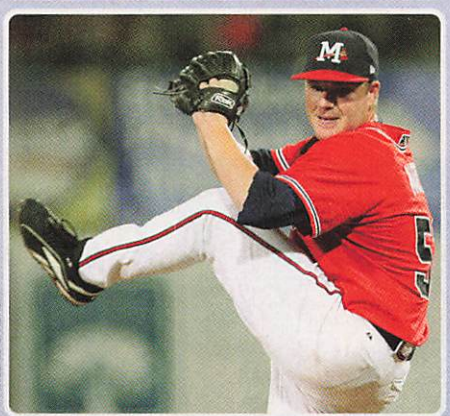
Marek, who has yet to pitch above the Double-A level, had the opportunity to meet Parr, who spent several weeks in the major leagues last year. Parr shared his experience in Atlanta with Marek, information he also heard on a broader scale from others who were September callups.

"They really stressed keeping a low profile in the clubhouse and just doing your thing on the field," Marek said. "They encouraged you not to get into it with anyone. When veterans tease you or make you dress up, they said you need to go along with it. They stressed that you need to earn respect, and you do that by being a good teammate."

The program headed by MLB has been in place for about two decades but continues to evolve.

Given the current economic situation in the country, financial matters were discussed at length this year, ranging from suggestions on investing, to proper money management techniques, to advice on making loans to loved ones. Throughout the long weekend, players were constantly reminded of how they can become targets for scams, with numerous people wanting to separate them from their money at every turn.





James Parr (above) was a combined 13-7 with a 3.52 ERA at Mississippi and Richmond before a September callup to Atlanta (1-0, 4.84), and Stephen Marek (below) was 1-2 with a save and a 3.21 ERA for Mississippi after being acquired from the Angels on July 31.

PHOTOS: ED GARDNER

"Coming up through the minor leagues, coaches are always stressing that you can never stop learning in this game," Parr said. "That's true in all aspects of the game. Hearing from guys who went through the exact same thing that you are is an incredible experience. It really hits home when you hear guys talk about how they handled difficult situations and overcame them."

In addition to an exhaustive explanation of the policies involving performance-enhancing drugs, players are informed about recreational drugs, including alcohol abuse. Dealings with the media are discussed in several ways, which Marek says were among the most beneficial parts for him.

"They showed good interviews on television, as well as bad interviews," Marek said. "They broke down the technical aspects of an interview and showed us how body language can say as much or more than words. The role playing was funny at times, but it really showed everyone how much you have to be aware of in the big leagues because of all the attention the players receive."

Both Marek and Parr raved about the meals served throughout the program as well as the opportunity to renew old acquaintances and meet new people who are in the process of going through the same ups and downs. By the end of the weekend, Parr was the first to admit he benefited more than he ever thought possible.

"I talked to a few guys who went through the program last year, because before that I wasn't real thrilled about doing it," Parr said. "It turned out to be a great experience. I think the biggest thing we learned was how to apply some concepts to our own lives, which are on the verge of changing in a big way."

THE INVITED

The Braves were more aggressive this year with their invitations to spring training. While other teams bring in a slew of players in hopes of catching lightning in a bottle, the Braves focused on several top prospects, a few catchers and six minor league veterans who have a chance to contribute in Atlanta, should a need arise at some point in the season.

The invited prospects include pitchers Tommy Hanson and Kris Medlen, catcher Matt Kennelly, infielders Brandon Hicks and Freddie Freeman and outfielders Jason Heyward and Jordan Schafer. All six are likely to open the season in the minor leagues, yet the Braves want the promising players to discover the protocol at the major league level and work in front of the big league coaching staff.

"It's an opportunity for these young men to learn by observing, as well as by participating," said Kurt Kemp, the Braves' director of player personnel. "This way everyone has a chance to get a little more comfortable for what everyone hopes will be an even greater opportunity in the future."

Left-handed pitcher Francisley Bueno, who was removed from the 40-man roster when the Braves signed free agent Derek Lowe, and catchers J.C. Boscan and Phillip Britton, were among those invited to big league camp. Six players signed as minor league free agents this winter who also received invitations include right-handed pitchers Rafael Cruz and Emiliano Fruto, left-handed pitchers Mariano Gomez and Juan Perez, catcher Alvin Colina and utility-man Brooks Conrad.

The 23-year-old Cruz made 22 starts for Veracruz in the Mexican League last year, posting an 11-5 record with a 4.18 ERA. The 6-foot, 195-pounder also pitched well in winter ball (4-3 record with 2 saves and a 3.24 ERA for Obregon). Fruto, a 24-year-old native of Colombia, is a versatile pitcher who went 6-6 with a 5.26 ERA in 49 games, including four starts, for Triple-A Tucson in 2008.

The southpaws include Gomez, a 26-year-old from Honduras who stands 6-foot-6 and weighs 195 pounds. Gomez served as a reliever in 54 games at Triple-A Rochester last year, going 5-2 with a save and a 2.76 ERA. Perez rebounded from an elbow injury to put together a strong performance for Triple-A Indianapolis. The 6-

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I JUST WANT TO STAY ON THE SAME TRACK

EDITOR'S NOTE

Craig Kimbrel was drafted by the Braves in the third round last June out of Wallace State (Ala.) Community College. He also was selected by Atlanta in the 33rd round in 2007 but opted to return to school. The right-handed reliever made an immediate impact last summer by saving 10 games during short stints at Danville, Rome and Myrtle Beach. He allowed but 16 hits in 35 innings and averaged 14.3 strikeouts per nine innings.

WITH LAST YEAR being my first time playing pro ball, it was definitely an eye-opening experience. I enjoyed it, and I'm excited that I pitched as well as I did. Now I have to go out and accomplish more.

Knowing that everyone is expecting a lot out of me is a good situation to be in. It really pushes me to do well. After receiving so much positive feedback from the coaches during the season and in Instructional League, the situation really made me work that much harder over the winter.

I know the Braves have high expectations for me, and I have high expectations for myself. But it's like anything else - when you have people who support you, it helps out a lot, especially with your confidence.

In rookie ball, I felt like I was facing the types of hitters I had seen in high school and at times in junior college. When I went to Rome and Myrtle Beach, I saw a significant progression at each level. The hitters kept getting better and better, and they're a lot more disciplined at the plate.

Instructional League was a real good experience. I got to meet a lot of the pitching coaches from throughout the organization. I had a chance to talk with many of the coaches and learn about pitching and the farm system.

They told me spring training is a lot like Instructional League, only there's a lot more people in the spring. That experience should make spring training a little more familiar for me.

> "I KNOW THE BRAVES HAVE HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR ME, AND I HAVE HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR MYSELF."

When I signed, I threw a fastball, curveball, changeup and slider. The Braves took away the slider, saying they didn't want me to hurt myself. They said my curveball was good enough that I didn't need to play around with a slider. Plus, my curveball is more of a "slurve." It's a hard curveball that works in much the same way as a slider.

Prior to the draft last year, I had a good feeling that things were going to work out well. As it turned out, I was drafted a lot higher than I thought I would be. And the fact that it was the Braves made everything that much better. They drafted me after my first year of junior college in a late round, but I decided to come back to school and that turned out to be a good decision.

Coming out of high school, it never crossed my mind that I could one day be drafted. I wound up going to junior college and had some success. I got stronger and started throwing harder, and good things happened.

I feel fortunate to be with an organization as good as the Braves. I grew up following the Braves, and my grandmother is one of the biggest Braves fans you'll find anywhere. She was tickled to death when she found out I had been drafted and then signed with the Braves. Growing up in Alabama, Atlanta is close to home, so it's really a great situation all the way around.

It has always been my dream to play professional baseball. My dream hasn't come true yet, because I'm still playing minor league ball. My dream is to pitch in the major leagues, and I'm working as hard as I can to get to that level. I'm the type of person who is going to push and try to attain even higher goals than the Braves set for me.

Of course, I'm going to try to pick up where I left off last season. Like I said, I couldn't be happier with the way things are going, and I just want to stay on that same track.

SPRING TRAINING ROSTER

MANAGER: Bobby Cox (6); **COACHES:** Chino Cadahia (52), Glenn Hubbard (17), Roger McDowell (45), Terry Pendleton (9), Eddie Perez (12), Brian Snitker (43)

40 MAN ROSTER

NO.	PITCHERS (24)	B-T	HT	WT	BIRTHDATE/PLACE	RESIDENCE	2008 CLUB	W-L	ERA	G	GS	CG	SV	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	ML SERVICE
46	ACOSTA, MANNY	S-R	6-4	170	5/1/81 in Colon, Panama	Colon, Panama	ATLANTA	3-5	3.57	46	0	0	3	53.0	48	25	21	26	31	1.052
							Richmond*	0-0	0.00	4	3	0	0	3.2	4	0	0	2	4	
30	BENNETT, JEFF	R-R	6-3	200	6/10/80 in Donelson, TN	Lebanon, TN	ATLANTA	3-7	3.70	72	4	0	3	97.1	86	44	40	47	68	2.012
							Myrtle Beach*	0-0	0.00	4	4	0	0	4.0	3	0	0	0	3	
56	BOYER, BLAINE	R-R	6-3	215	7/11/81 in Atlanta, GA	Marietta, GA	ATLANTA	2-6	5.88	76	0	0	1	72.0	73	51	47	25	67	2.122
57	CAMPILLO, JORGE	R-R	6-1	225	8/10/78 in Tijuana, Mexico	Tijuana, Mexico	Richmond	0-0	0.00	1	1	0	0	4.1	5	0	0	0	4	1.101
							ATLANTA	8-7	3.91	39	25	1	0	158.2	158	74	69	38	107	
38	CARLYLE, BUDDY	L-R	6-3	210	12/21/77 in Omaha, NE	Papillion, NE	Richmond	0-0	7.04	2	2	0	0	7.2	11	7	6	3	7	2.055
							ATLANTA	2-0	3.59	45	0	0	0	62.2	52	26	25	26	59	
51	GONZALEZ, MIKE	R-L	6-2	213	5/23/78 in Robstown, TX	Deer Park, TX	Mississippi*	0-0	0.00	4	0	0	0	5.0	7	0	0	0	4	5.014
							Richmond*	1-0	1.50	5	0	0	1	6.0	5	1	1	1	8	
							ATLANTA	0-3	4.28	36	0	0	14	33.2	26	21	16	14	44	
15	HUDSON, TIM	R-R	6-1	170	7/14/75 in Columbus, GA	Peachtree City, GA	ATLANTA	11-7	3.17	23	22	1	0	142.0	125	53	50	40	85	9.119
49	JURRJENS, JAIR	R-R	6-1	200	1/29/86 in Willemstad, Curacao	Willemstad, Curacao	ATLANTA	13-10	3.68	31	31	0	0	188.1	188	87	77	70	139	1.047
11	KAWAKAMI, KENSHIN	R-R	6-0	200	6/22/75 in Tokushima, Japan	Nagoya City, Japan	Chunichi (Japan)	9-5	2.30	20	20	1	0	117.1	99	33	30	25	112	0.000
54	LEREW, ANTHONY	L-R	6-3	220	10/28/82 in Carlisle, PA	Wellsville, PA	Gulf Coast League	0-1	5.40	5	5	0	0	11.2	11	9	7	6	8	1.126
							Richmond	1-4	4.14	9	8	0	0	37.0	43	24	17	20	22	
36	LOGAN, BOONE	R-L	6-5	215	8/13/84 in San Antonio, TX	Helotes, TX	CHICAGO (AL)	2-3	5.95	55	0	0	0	42.1	57	31	28	14	42	2.072
							Charlotte	0-1	6.00	5	0	0	0	9.0	10	8	6	6	7	
32	LOWE, DEREK	R-R	6-6	230	6/1/73 in Dearborn, MI	Manhattan Beach, CA	LOS ANGELES (NL)	14-11	3.24	34	34	1	0	211.0	194	84	76	45	147	11.100
65	MAREK, STEPHEN	R-R	6-2	200	9/3/83 in Houston, TX	Sealy, TX	Arkansas	2-5	3.66	34	0	0	3	46.2	39	20	19	21	57	0.000
							Mississippi	1-2	3.21	10	0	0	1	14.0	12	5	5	6	11	
50	MORTON, CHARLIE	R-R	6-4	190	11/12/83 in Flemington, NJ	Johns Island, SC	Richmond	5-2	2.05	13	12	0	0	79.0	51	20	18	27	72	0.103
							ATLANTA	4-8	6.15	16	15	0	0	74.2	80	56	51	41	48	
58	MOYLAN, PETER	R-R	6-2	200	12/2/78 in Lesmurdie, Australia	Suwanee, GA	ATLANTA	0-1	1.59	7	0	0	1	5.2	5	1	1	1	5	2.061
34	O'FLAHERTY, ERIC	L-L	6-2	220	2/5/85 in Walla Walla, WA	Walla Walla, WA	SEATTLE	0-1	20.25	7	0	0	0	6.2	16	15	15	4	4	1.062
							West Tennessee	0-0	0.00	1	0	0	0	2.0	1	0	0	0	2	
							Tacoma	1-2	4.96	14	0	0	2	16.1	23	9	9	9	13	
61	PARR, JAMES	R-R	6-1	185	2/27/86 in Albuquerque, NM	Albuquerque, NM	Mississippi	8-4	3.69	18	17	0	0	95.0	87	40	39	37	81	0.027
							Richmond	5-3	3.23	10	9	0	0	55.2	49	20	20	14	44	
							ATLANTA	1-0	4.84	5	5	0	0	22.1	29	13	12	9	14	
66	REDMOND, TODD	R-R	6-3	213	5/17/85 in St. Petersburg, FL	St. Petersburg, FL	Mississippi	13-5	3.52	28	27	0	0	166.1	164	72	65	33	133	0.000
37	REYES, JO-JO	L-L	6-2	230	11/20/84 in West Covina, CA	Riverside, CA	Richmond	1-1	2.31	8	8	0	0	39.0	31	11	10	16	38	1.046
							ATLANTA	3-11	5.81	23	22	0	0	113.0	134	77	73	52	78	
40	RIDGWAY, JEFF	R-L	6-3	210	8/17/80 in Port Angeles, WA	Summerville, SC	Richmond	4-0	5.47	44	0	0	4	52.2	67	38	32	26	57	0.052
							ATLANTA	1-0	3.72	10	0	0	0	9.2	7	4	4	1	8	
39	SORIANO, RAFAEL	R-R	6-1	220	12/19/79 in San Jose, DR	Andres Boca Chica, DR	ATLANTA	0-1	2.57	14	0	0	3	14.0	7	5	4	9	16	6.057
							DSL-Braves*	0-1	0.00	2	2	0	0	2.0	3	1	0	0	2	
							Mississippi*	0-0	0.00	2	1	0	0	2.0	1	0	0	1	2	
48	STOCKMAN, PHIL	R-R	6-8	251	1/25/80 in Oldham, Lancashire UK	Brisbane, Australia	Richmond	1-1	2.10	19	0	0	2	30.0	15	7	7	18	26	0.144
62	VALDEZ, LUIS	R-R	6-2	195	5/5/84 in Sabrana Palenque, DR	San Cristobal Palenque, DR	Mississippi	4-3	2.76	55	0	0	28	65.1	48	30	20	36	77	0.000
33	VAZQUEZ, JAVIER	R-R	6-1	210	7/25/76 in Ponce, PR	Ponce, PR	CHICAGO (AL)	12-16	4.67	33	33	1	0	208.1	214	113	108	61	200	10.14

NO.	CATCHERS (3)	B-T	HT	WT	BIRTHDATE-PLACE	RESIDENCE	2008 CLUB	AVG	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	ML SERV
16	McCANN, BRIAN	L-R	6-3	230	2/20/84 in Athens, GA	Suwanee, GA	ATLANTA	.301	145	509	68	153	42	1	23	87	57	64	5	3.117
8	ROSS, DAVID	R-R	6-2	238	3/19/77 in Bainbridge, GA	Tallahassee, FL	Sarasota*	.182	4	11	2	2	0	0	0	1	3	4	0	6.001
							Louisville*	.206	10	34	5	7	1	1	2	3	3	13	0	
							CINCINNATI	.231	52	134	17	31	9	0	3	13	32	36	0	
							Pawtucket	.250	6	28	4	7	1	0	1	3	1	7	0	
							BOSTON	.125	8	8	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	
5	SAMMONS, CLINT	R-R	6-0	200	5/15/83 in Decatur, GA	Atlanta, GA	Richmond	.237	81	278	23	66	18	0	1	22	21	60	7	0.083
							ATLANTA	.148	23	54	2	8	0	0	1	4	5	12	0	

NO.	INFIELDERS (8)	B-T	HT	WT	BIRTHDATE-PLACE	RESIDENCE	2008 CLUB	AVG	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	ML SERV
19	ESCOBAR, YUNEL	R-R	6-2	200	11/2/82 in Havana, Cuba	Miami, FL	ATLANTA	.288	136	514	71	148	24	2	10	60	59	62	2	1.121
63	HERNANDEZ, DIORY	R-R	6-0	185	4/8/84 in San Pedro de Macoris, DR	San Pedro de Macoris, DR	Mississippi	.286	22	77	8	22	3	1	2	8	6	8	1	0.000
							Richmond	.288	120	459	46	132	23	3	5	53	20	73	7	
4	INFANTE, OMAR	R-R	6-0	180	12/26/81 in Puerto la Cruz, VZ	Amzuatezuiz, VZ	Richmond*	.364	3	11	3	4	1	0	0	3	1	1	0	5.120
							ATLANTA	.293	96	317	45	93	24	3	3	40	22	44	0	
2	JOHNSON, KELLY	L-R	6-1	205	2/22/82 in Austin, TX	Atlanta, GA	ATLANTA	.287	150	547	86	157	39	6	12	69	52	113	11	3.127
10	JONES, CHIPPER	S-R	6-4	210	4/24/72 in DeLand, FL	Carrizo Springs, TX	ATLANTA	.364	128	439	82	160	24	1	22	75	90	61	4	15.024
22	KOTCHMAN, CASEY	L-L	6-3	215	2/22/83 in St. Petersburg, FL	Seminole, FL	LOS ANGELES (AL)	.287	100	373	47	107	24	0	12	54	18	23	2	3.144
							ATLANTA	.237	43	152	18	36	4	1	2	20	18	16	0	
20	NORTON, GREG	S-R	6-1	205	7/6/72 in San Leandro, CA	Denver, CO	Tacoma	.409	8	22	3	9	2	0	0	3	2	3	1	9.163
							SEATTLE	.438	6	16	2	7	2	0	0	4	2	4	0	
							ATLANTA	.246	111	171	27	42	10	0	7	31	31	40	0	
14	PRADO, MARTIN	R-R	6-1	190	10/27/83 in Maracay, Venezuela	Maracay, Venezuela	Mississippi*	.263	5	19	2	5	2	0	0	3	3	2	0	1.105
							ATLANTA	.320	78	228	36	73	18	4	2	33	21	29	3	

NO.	OUTFIELDERS (5)	B-T	HT	WT	BIRTHDATE-PLACE	RESIDENCE	2008 CLUB	AVG	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	ML SERV
24	ANDERSON, JOSH	L-R	6-2	195	8/10/82 in Somerset, KY	Eubank, KY	Richmond	.314	121	494	77	155	25	4	4	40	30	57	42	0.076
							ATLANTA	.294	40	136	21	40	7	1	3	12	8	33	10	
1	BLANCO, GREGOR	L-L	5-11	170	12/24/83 in Caracas, VZ	Cua, VZ	ATLANTA	.251	144	430	52	108	14	4	1	38	74	99	13	1.000
23	DIAZ, MATT	R-R	6-1	215	3/3/78 in Portland, OR	Lakeland, FL	ATLANTA	.244	43	135	9	33	2	0	2	14	3	32	4	3.157
							Mississippi*	.231	7	26	5	6	0	0	1	4	2	5	1	
							Richmond*	.167	4	12	0	2	0	0	0	1	1	3	0	
7	FRANCOEUR, JEFF	R-R	6-4	220	1/8/84 in Atlanta, GA	Lilburn, GA	ATLANTA	.239	155	599	70	143	33	3	11	71	39	111	0	3.088
							Mississippi	.538	3	13	3	7	0	1	0	2	1	2	0	
28	JONES, BRANDON	L-R	6-1	210	12/10/83 in Panama City, FL	Wewahitchka, FL	Richmond	.260	95	346	44	90	24	1	8	52	46	76	9	0.076
							ATLANTA	.267	41	116	16	31	10	1	1	17	7	28	1	

NON-ROSTER INVITEES

NO.	PITCHERS (7)	B-T	HT	WT	BIRTHDATE-PLACE	RESIDENCE	2008 CLUB	W-L	ERA	G	GS	CG	SV	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	ML SERV
59	BUENO, FRANCISLEY	L-L	5-11	200	3/5/81 in Havana, Cuba	Santo Domingo, DR	Richmond	2-6	5.23	19	14	0	0	84.1	100	51	49	29	59	0.011
							ATLANTA	0-0	7.71	1	0	0	0	2.1	5	2	2	1	1	
74	CRUZ, RAFAEL P.	R-R	6-0	225	5/19/77 in Santiago, D.R.	Santiago, D.R.	Chunichi (Japan)	1-3	2.66	17	0	0	0	20.1	13	7	6	6	18	0.000
70	FRUTO, EMILIANO	R-R	6-3	230	6/6/84 in Bolivar, Colombia	Bolivar, Colombia	Tucson	6-6	5.26	49	4	0	2	89.0	88	58	52	59	102	0.088
71	GOMEZ, MARIANO	L-L	6-6	240	9/12/82 in San Pedro Sula, Honduras	San Pedro Sula, Honduras	Rochester	5-2	2.76	54	0	0	1	65.1	68	26	20	22	45	0.000
73	HANSON, TOMMY	R-R	6-6	210	8/28/86 in Tulsa, OK	Redlands, CA	Myrtle Beach	3-1	0.90	7	7	0	0	40.0	15	6	4	11	49	0.000
							Mississippi	8-4	3.03	18	18	1	0	98.0	70	39	33	41	114	
72	MEDLEN, KRIS	R-R	5-10	175	10/7/85 in Artesia, CA	Norwalk, CA	Mississippi	7-8	3.52	36	17	0	1	120.1	121	47	47	27	120	0.000
67	PEREZ, JUAN P.	R-L	6-0	180	9/3/78 in Villa Rivas, D.R.	Villa Rivas, D.R.	GCL Pirates*	1-0	0.00	4	0	0	0	6.0	2	1	0	2	8	0.078
							Indianapolis	2-2	3.57	20	0	0	1	22.2	17	10	9	12	35	

NO.	CATCHERS (4)	B-T	HT	WT	BIRTHDATE-PLACE	RESIDENCE	2008 CLUB	AVG	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	ML SERV
27	BOSCAN, J.C.	R-R	6-2	215	12/26/79 in Maracaibo, VZ	Maracaibo, Venezuela	Mississippi	.235	79	255	26	60	13	0	2	29	34	49	0	0.000
78	BRITTON, PHILLIP	R-R	6-0	205	9/25/84 in Richland County, IL	Olney, IL	Myrtle Beach	.246	84	297	30	73	10	1	6	26	11	42	5	0.000
							Mississippi	.000	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	
69	COLINA, ALVIN	R-R	6-3	210	12/26/81 in Puerto Cabello, VZ	Carabobo, VZ	Louisville	.256	65	227	25	58	8	2	8	54	17	68	2	0.024
79	KENNELLY, MATT	R-R	6-1	180	3/21/89 in East Fremantle, W. Australia	Palmyra, W. Australia	Danville	.246	44	167	14	41	9	0	4	25	8	37	0	0.000
							Rome	.457	10	35	4	16	5	0	0	10	2	8	0	

NO.	INFIELDERS (3)	B-T	HT	WT	BIRTHDATE-PLACE	RESIDENCE	2008 CLUB	AVG	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	ML SERV
68	CONRAD, BROOKS	R-R	5-11	190	1/16/80 in San Diego, CA	Spring Valley, CA	Sacramento	.243	117	465	86	113	29	5	28	91	46	127	4	0.023
							OAKLAND	.158	6	19	0	3	1	0	0	2	0	9	0	
76	FREEMAN, FREDDIE	L-R	6-5	220	9/12/89 in Fountain Valley, CA	Villa Park, CA	Rome	.316	130	491	70	155	33	7	18	95	46	84	5	0.000
75	HICKS, BRANDON	R-R	6-2	200	9/19/85 in Houston, TX	Pasadena, TX	Myrtle Beach	.234	93	342	68	80	23	2	19	56	45	122	14	0.000
							Mississippi	.241	16	54	9	13	3	1	1	7	7	17	0	

NO.	OUTFIELDERS (2)	B-T	HT	WT	BIRTHDATE-PLACE	RESIDENCE	2008 CLUB	AVG	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	ML SERV
77	HEYWARD, JASON	L-L	6-4	220	8/9/89 in Ridgewood, NJ	McDonough, GA	Rome	.323	120	449	88	145	27	6	11	52	49	74	15	0.000
							Myrtle Beach	.182	7	22	3	4	2	0	0	4	2	4	0	
64	SCHAFER, JORDAN	L-L	6-1	200	9/4/86 in Hammond, IN	Haines City, FL	Mississippi	.269	84	297	46	80	18	6	10	51	49	88	12	0.000

Strength & Conditioning Coach: Phil Falco (60)
Baseball Systems Operator & Bullpen Catcher: Alan Butts (55)

Executive Vice President & GM: Frank Wren
Assistant General Manager: Bruce Manno
Head Team Physician: Dr. Norman Elliott
Lead Team Orthopedist: Dr. Xavier Duralde
Head Athletic Trainer: Jeff Porter
Assistant Athletic Trainer: Jim Lovell

Director of Team Travel: Bill Acree
Assistant Clubhouse & Equipment Manager: Ben Acree
Assistant Clubhouse & Team Travel Manager: Chris Van Zant
Visiting Clubhouse Manager: John Holland
Assistant Braves & Visiting Clubhouse Manager: Fred Stone
Director of Media Relations: Brad Hainje
Field Director: Ed Mangan

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 45

2009 SCHEDULE

DANVILLE BRAVES
APPALACHIAN LEAGUE
ROOKIE ADVANCED

LEGION FIELD AT DAN DANIEL PARK
(434) 797-3792
DBRAVES.COM

JUNE	
23-25	at Pulaski
26-28	at Greeneville
29-30	Kingsport

JULY	
1	Kingsport
2-4	Princeton
5-7	at Pulaski
8	at Bluefield
9-10	Bluefield
11-13	atBurlington
15-17	Elizabethton
18-20	Bristol
21-23	at Johnson City
24	at Bluefield
25-26	Bluefield
27	Burlington
28-30	atBurlington
31	atBristol

AUGUST	
1-2	at Bristol
4-6	Princeton
7-9	Pulaski
10-12	at Princeton
13-15	Burlington
16-18	at Elizabethton
20-22	Greeneville
23-25	Johnson City
26	at Burlington
27-28	Bluefield
29	at Bluefield
30-31	at Kingsport

SEPTEMBER	
1	at Kingsport

foot, 180-pound Dominican joined the team at mid-season and proceeded to go 2-2 with a save and a 3.57 ERA in 20 outings. Perez had 35 strikeouts in 22 2/3 innings and limited opponents to a .207 batting average, but issued 12 walks.

Colina, a former catching prospect in the Colorado farm system, hit .256 with eight homers and 54 RBIs in 65 games and 227 at-bats at Triple-A Louisville last year. The 27-year-old Venezuelan should add power to the Gwinnett lineup, as should Conrad, a 29-year-old switch-hitter who batted .243 with 28 home runs and 91 RBIs in 117 games at Triple-A Sacramento. Conrad played every infield position, as well as both corner outfield spots in the minors last year, and received a six-game promotion to Oakland in late July.

ORGANIZATION NOTES

Spring training is always a time to monitor players who are out of options. In other words, these are players the Braves can't send back to the minor leagues without placing them on waivers, which makes them available to the 29 other major league clubs.

That situation affects relievers **Blaine Boyer** and **Phil Stockman**, both with substantial major league experience, as well as right-handed pitcher **Anthony Lerew** and outfielder Josh Anderson. Lerew is continuing his return from major surgery that limited him to a handful of minor league outings last year. Anderson spent most of September with the Braves and is competing for the center field job in Atlanta...

Outfielder **Gregor Blanco** and infielder **Martin Prado** had solid showings in the Venezuelan Winter League. Blanco, who ranked sixth in the regular season with a .349 batting average for La Guaira, hit .292 in the playoffs while ranking fourth in postseason play with a .424 on-base percentage. Blanco also showed more patience at the plate by leading the league with 37 walks. Prado batted .284, including a .362 on-base percentage for Aragua...

Tommy Thrall has been named the director of broadcasting and communications for the Myrtle Beach Pelicans. Thrall becomes the "voice of the Pelicans" after serving as the play-by-play announcer for the Kansas City T-Bones of the independent Northern League...

Keith Law of Scouts, Inc., ranked the Braves fourth among all 30 major league farm systems in a recent article on espn.com. Law wrote, "Still one of the best and deepest systems in the game despite the trades for **Mark Teixeira** and **Javier Vazquez**. Scouting director **Roy Clark** and his staff are among the game's best, with a knack for finding talent beyond the first round while they remain quietly productive on the international front."

McCANN'S THE MAN

Brian McCann was honored as the first inductee into the Rome Braves Hometown Heroes Hall of Fame Jan. 26 at the team's annual Hot Stove Gathering at The Forum civic center in downtown Rome. Not only that, but McCann's uniform No. 17 was retired, as well, by Atlanta's Class-A affiliate.

McCann was the starting catcher for the Rome Braves' inaugural season in 2003 when they won the South Atlantic League Championship. Rome Braves general manager Mike Dunn presented McCann with the award.

Atlanta coaches Chino Cadahia and Brian Snitker attended the event, along with Rome's 2009 field staff, including manager Randy Ingle, Wes Timmons and Jonathan Schuerholz, who were McCann's teammates on the 2003 team, and Scott Schade, who played with the team in 2004.

The proceeds from the night's activities, including a raffle and silent auction, were donated to Cancer Navigators of Rome in memory of former Atlanta Braves bench coach Jim Beauchamp.

ROME BRAVES

Brian McCann greets a young fan who turned out in Rome to see the Braves catcher honored as the inaugural inductee in the Rome Braves Hometown Heroes Hall of Fame, and with the retirement of his uniform number, as well.

2009 SCHEDULE

GAME TIMES EASTERN, BROADCAST INFO TO BE ANNOUNCED.
TENTATIVE; SUBJECT TO CHANGE
FOR SEASON, GROUP AND SUITE TICKET INFORMATION CALL (404) 577-9100

APRIL

Braves — HOME — AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1	2	3 7:00 PM EXIBITION DET	4 1:00 PM EXIBITION DET
5 8:00 PM SEASON OPENER PHI ESPN2	6	7 7:00 PM PHI	8 3:00 PM PHI	9	10 7:30 PM HOME OPENER WSH	11 7:00 PM WSH
12 1:30 PM WSH	13	14 7:00 PM FLA	15 7:00 PM FLA	16 12:00 PM FLA	17 7:00 PM PIT	18 12:30 PM PIT
19 1:30 PM PIT	20 7:00 PM WSH	21 7:00 PM WSH	22 7:00 PM WSH	23	24 7:00 PM CIN	25 1:00 PM CIN
26 1:00 PM CIN	27 7:00 PM STL	28 7:00 PM STL	29 7:00 PM STL	30		

MAY

Braves — HOME — AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1 7:30 PM HOU	2 3:30 PM HOU FOX
3 1:30 PM HOU	4 7:00 PM NYM	5 7:00 PM NYM	6 7:00 PM FLA	7 12:00 PM FLA	8 7:00 PM PHI	9 3:30 PM PHI FOX
10 1:30 PM PHI	11 7:00 PM NYM	12 7:00 PM NYM	13 1:00 PM NYM	14	15 7:30 PM ARI	16 7:00 PM ARI
17 1:30 PM ARI	18 7:00 PM COL	19 7:00 PM COL	20 7:00 PM COL	21 7:00 PM COL	22 7:30 PM TOR	23 7:00 PM TOR
24 1:30 PM TOR	25 4:00 PM SF	26 10:00 PM SF	27 10:00 PM SF	28 9:30 PM ARI	29 9:30 PM ARI	30 4:00 PM ARI FOX
31 4:00 PM ARI						

JUNE

Braves — HOME — AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2 7:00 PM CHC	3 7:00 PM CHC	4 7:00 PM CHC	5 7:30 PM MIL	6 7:00 PM MIL
7 1:30 PM MIL	8 7:00 PM PIT	9 7:00 PM PIT	10 7:00 PM PIT	11 1:00 PM PIT	12 7:00 PM BAL	13 7:00 PM BAL
14 1:30 PM BAL	15	16 7:00 PM CIN	17 7:00 PM CIN	18 12:30 PM CIN	19 7:00 PM BOS	20 7:00 PM BOS
21 1:30 PM BOS	22	23 7:00 PM NYY	24 7:00 PM NYY	25 7:00 PM NYY	26 7:30 PM BOS	27 4:00 PM BOS FOX
28 1:30 PM BOS	29	30 7:00 PM PHI				

2009 SCHEDULE

JULY

Braves — HOME — AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1 7:00 PM PHI	2 7:00 PM PHI	3 6:30 PM WAS	4 1:00 PM WAS
5 1:30 PM WAS	6 8:00 PM CHC	7 8:00 PM CHC	8 2:00 PM CHC	9 8:30 PM COL	10 9:00 PM COL	11 8:00 PM COL
12 3:00 PM COL	13	14 ST. LOUIS ALL-STAR GAME	15	16 7:00 PM NYM	17 7:30 PM MYM	18 4:00 PM FOX NYM
19 6:00 PM ESPN NYM	20 7:00 PM SF	21 7:00 PM SF	22 7:00 PM SF	23 1:00 PM SF	24 8:00 PM MIL	25 7:00 PM MIL
26 2:00 PM MIL	27	28 7:00 PM FLA	29 7:00 PM FLA	30 7:00 PM FLA	31 7:30 PM LA	

AUGUST

Braves — HOME — AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1 4:00 PM FOX LA
2 1:30 PM LA	3 10:00 PM SD	4 10:00 PM SD	5 3:30 PM SD	6 10:00 PM LA	7 10:00 PM LA	8 10:00 PM LA
9 4:00 PM LA	10	11 7:00 PM WAS	12 7:00 PM WAS	13	14 7:30 PM PHI	15 4:00 PM FOX PHI
16 1:30 PM PHI	17	18 7:00 PM NYM	19 7:00 PM NYM	20 7:00 PM NYM	21 7:30 PM FLA	22 7:00 PM FLA
23 1:30 PM FLA	24	25 7:00 PM SD	26 7:00 PM SD	27 7:00 PM SD	28 7:00 PM PHI	29 7:00 PM PHI
30 1:30 PM PHI	31 7:00 PM FLA					

SEPT./OCT.

Braves — HOME — AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1 7:00 PM FLA	2 7:00 PM FLA	3 7:00 PM FLA	4 7:30 PM CIN	5 7:00 PM CIN
6 1:30 PM CIN	7	8 8:00 PM HOU	9 8:00 PM HOU	10 8:00 PM HOU	11 8:00 PM STL	12 4:00 PM FOX STL
13 2:00 PM STL	14	15 7:00 PM NYM	16 7:00 PM NYM	17 7:00 PM NYM	18 7:30 PM PHI	19 7:00 PM PHI
20 1:30 PM PHI	21 7:00 PM NYM	22 7:00 PM NYM	23 7:00 PM NYM	24	25 7:00 PM WAS	26 1:00 PM WAS
27 1:30 PM WAS	28 7:00 PM FLA	29 7:00 PM FLA	30 7:00 PM FLA	1 7:00 PM WAS	2 7:30 PM WAS	3 7:00 PM WAS
4 1:30 PM WAS						

TICKETING

TO PURCHASE TICKETS OR FOR TICKET INFORMATION, CALL (404) 577-9100 OR VISIT braves.com

INDIVIDUAL GAME TICKETS

At press time, the Braves had not released information about the sale of individual game tickets for the 2009 season. Visit braves.com for updated information.

20-GAME PLANS

Get the same seat for every pre-selected game in the Field Level ($640 for 20 games) or Lexus Level ($720 for 20 games). Four different packages available (visit braves.com to see specific dates):

MURPHY PLAN

Variety of Tuesday and Friday games.

COX PLAN

Variety of Wednesday and Saturday games.

NIEKRO PLAN

Variety of Thursday and Sunday games.

SPAHN PLAN

Variety of key matchup weekday games.

TICKETING

6-GAME PACKS

Terrace Level	$220 per seat
Outfield Pavilion	$136 per seat
Upper Box	$76 per seat

OPTION 1

April 11	Washington
May 1	Houston
June 25	Yankees
June 28	Red Sox
Aug. 22	Florida
Sept. 19	Philadelphia

YANKEES PACKAGE

June 23	Yankees
June 24	Yankees
June 25	Yankees
July 23	San Francisco
Aug. 23	Florida
Sept. 20	Philadelphia

RED SOX PACKAGE

June 26	Red Sox
June 27	Red Sox
June 28	Red Sox
Aug. 16	Philadelphia
Aug. 27	San Diego
Sept. 17	Mets

FLEX PLANS

Priced as low as $99 (9 games/upper box location). Pick as few as 9 games or as many as 83 games and save up to $6 per ticket. Exchange tickets up to 24 hours prior to start of any game in your plan.

Location	Regular/Premium	Flex Price	Yankees/Red Sox	Flex Price
Golden Moon Casino	$38/$42	$37	$48	$42
Terrace	$36/$40	$35	$46	$40
Field/Terrace Pavilion	$22/$26	$21	$32	$26
Upper Box	$12/$16	$11	$22	$16

WEEKEND PLAN

Get the same location for 30 weekend games.

Field Level	$960
Golden Moon Casino	$1,080
Outfield Pavilion	$510
Upper Box	$330

HALF SEASON TICKET PLAN

Get the same location to 42 pre-selected games, including Opening Night, all Friday and Saturday games, and at least one game against all 2009 visiting teams.

Field Level	$1,344
Golden Moon Casino	$1,512
Outfield Pavilion	$714
Upper Box	$462

MUSEUM & TOUR INFO

The Ivan Allen Jr. Braves Museum features more than 500 Braves artifacts that trace the team's history from its beginnings in Boston (1871-1952) to Milwaukee (1953-65) to Atlanta (1966-present). It is located on the northwest side of Turner Field at aisle 134. The museum opens two and a half hours before each game and closes in the middle of the seventh inning. The museum is open year-round and is the starting point of one-hour guided tours of Turner Field. Tours leave on the hour.

Tour reservations are not necessary for individuals or groups of less than 20 people. Tickets can be purchased the day of the tour at the main ticket window. Free parking in the Green lot.

Admission to the museum during games is one token ($2) and $5 on non-game days. Tour tickets are $12 for adults, $7 for children and $10 for groups of 20 or more. Walk-up tickets can be purchased at the ticket window. Groups of 20 or more and school groups must make reservations two weeks in advance by calling (404) 614-2311.

HOURS OF OPERATION

OCTOBER - MARCH	
Monday - Saturday	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
DEC. 23-JAN. 3	CLOSED
APRIL - OCTOBER	
Monday - Saturday	9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Sunday	1 - 3 p.m.

TOUR TICKETS

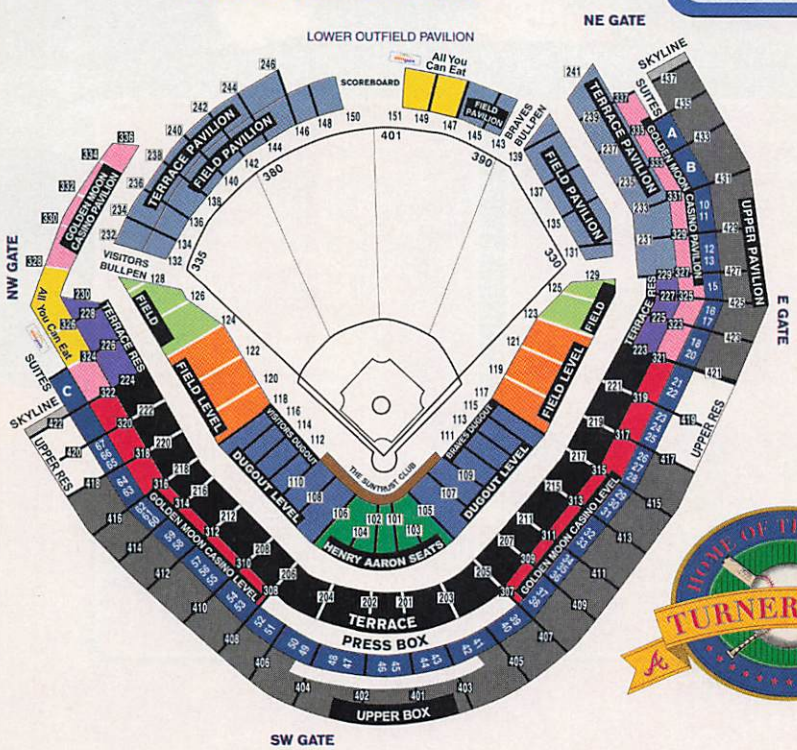
ADULTS	$12
CHILDREN 13 and Under	$7
MILITARY	$7
GROUP	$10

SCHOOL GROUP PRICES

CHILDREN	$5
ADULTS	$7

*Subject to change
Tours not available when the Braves have afternoon home games

TURNER FIELD SEATING



GIVE A GIFT CARD

Braves Gift Cards are available in denominations from $25 to $250 and can be used to purchase Tickets, Concessions and Merchandise.

To purchase Gift Cards or to obtain more information, visit Braves.com or the Braves Clubhouse Store at CNN Center (call 404-523-5854).

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April 2005	Starting Rotation
May 2005	Andruw Jones
June 2005	Tim Hudson
July 2005	Kyle Davies
August 2005	Johnson & Langerhans
September 2005	Jeff Francoeur
October 2005	Andruw Jones
November 2005	Brian McCann
December 2005	Andruw Jones
January 2006	Edgar Renteria
February 2006	Niekro, Aaron, Lemaster
March 2006	LaRoche Family
April 2006	Andruw, Smoltz, Chipper
May 2006	Chris Reitsma
June 2006	Francoeur's Slam
July 2006	Edgar Renteria

August 2006	Brian McCann
September 2006	Bob Wickman
October 2006	John Smoltz
November 2006	Bobby Cox
December 2006	Jeff Francoeur
January 2007	Rafael Soriano
February 2007	Spring Training
March 2007	Mike Gonzalez
April 2007	Andruw Jones (Sold Out)
May 2007	Hubbard & Johnson (Sold Out)
June 2007	John Smoltz
July 2007	Diaz & Harris
August 2007	Edgar Renteria
September 2007	Mark Teixeira
October 2007	Jeff Francoeur

November 2007	Chipper Jones
December 2007	John Smoltz
January 2008	Tom Glavine
February 2008	Tim Hudson
March 2008	Mark Kotsay
April 2008	Teixeira & Jones
May 2008	Brian McCann
June 2008	Jair Jurrjens
July 2008	Chipper Jones
August 2008	McCann & Jones
September 2008	Skip Caray
October 2008	Brian McCann
November 2008	Chipper Jones
December 2008	Pete Van Wieren
January 2009	Frank Wren
February 2009	Hank Aaron

SPRING TRAINING 2009

TICKETS

SPRING TRAINING TICKETS

Lower Level Reserved	$28
Upper Level Reserved (Rows A-L)	$24
Upper Level Reserved (Rows M-W)	$22
Bleacher Reserved (Sections 104-106)	$24
Bleacher Reserved (Sections 101-103)	$22
General Admission Lawn	$15

* Add $4 per ticket for Premium Games (Yankees, Mets, Red Sox)

Individual tickets are on sale via Ticketmaster (407-839-3900), ticketmaster.com, the Disney Wide World of Sports Complex box office, and braves.com.

Champion Stadium opens 3 hours prior to game time.

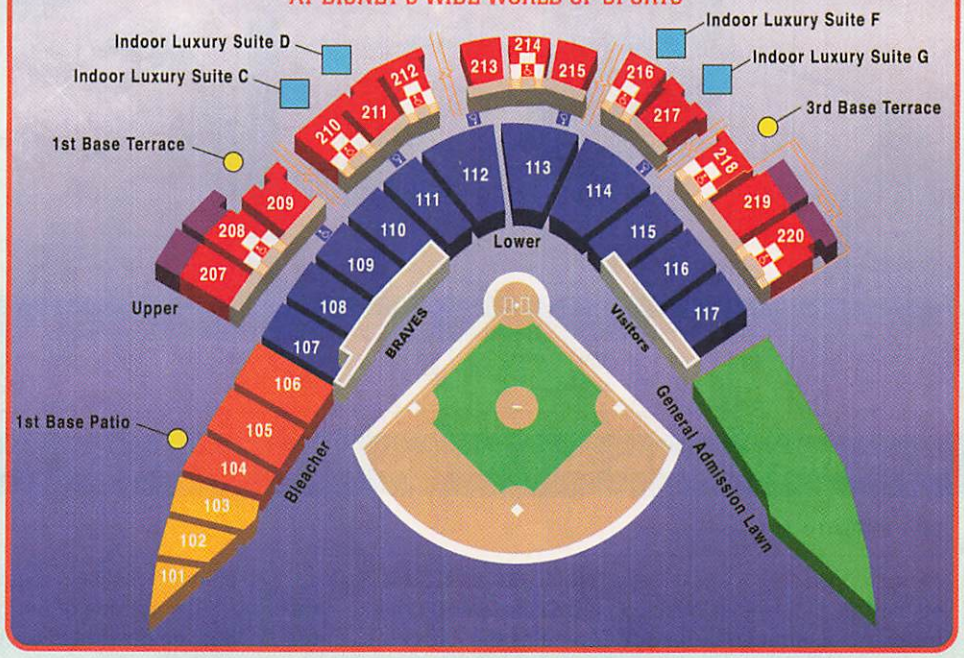
ON-FIELD SPECTATOR EXPERIENCE

An exclusive pre-game On-Field Spectator Experience allows fans on the field behind home plate for 2 hours and 15 minutes to watch the Braves and their opponents warm up before games. A limited number of tickets are available for each game at a cost of $75.

Call (407) 939-GAME (4263) or visit disneysports.com/atlantabraves for additional information.

CHAMPION STADIUM

AT DISNEY'S WIDE WORLD OF SPORTS



5-GAME MINI PLAN

$128

Mar. 12 - Nationals; Mar. 15 - Astros; Mar. 17 - Mets; Mar. 20 - Marlins; Mar. 28 - Yankees.

1ST HALF 3-GAME MINI PLAN

$76

Mar. 1 - Phillies; Mar. 4 - Yankees; Mar. 6 - Astros

2ND HALF 3-GAME MINI PLAN

$76

Mar. 24 - Pirates; Mar. 27 - Tigers; Mar. 30 - Red Sox

NOTE: Mini Plan seats are located in select upper level reserved sections (rows A-L) or bleacher reserved sections 104-106.

Full season tickets are priced from $323 to $425.

Tickets for the April 3 and 4 exhibition games against Detroit at Turner Field are on sale at braves.com, ticketmaster.com and at Publix Ticketmaster locations.

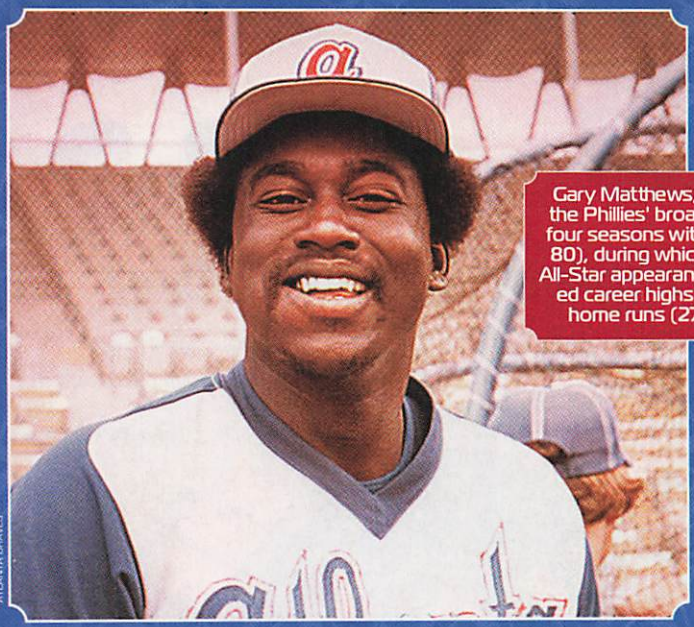
BROADCAST INFO TO BE ANNOUNCED.
GAME TIMES EASTERN AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE; ALL HOME GAMES @ CHAMPION STADIUM, DISNEY'S WIDE WORLD OF SPORTS

FEB/MARCH/APRIL

HOME AWAY

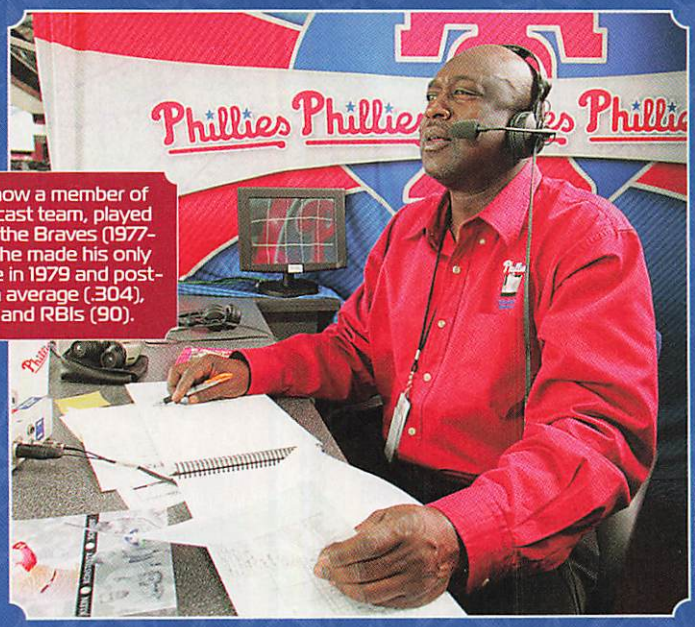
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			25 1:05 PM DET @ Lakeland	26 1:05 PM HOU	27 1:05 PM PIT @ Bradenton	28 1:05 PM TOR @ Dunedin
1 1:05 PM PHI	2	3 1:05 PM *WBC Panama	4 1:05 PM NYY	5 2:05 PM *WBC Venezuela	6 7:05 PM HOU	7 1:15 PM NYY @ Tampa
8 1:05 PM PHI	9	10 1:05 PM HOU @ Kissimmee	11 1:05 PM PHI @ Clearwater	12 1:05 PM WAS	13 1:05 PM FLA @ Jupiter	14 1:05 PM STL @ Jupiter
15 1:05 PM HOU	16	17 1:05 PM NYM FSS	18 1:10 PM NYM @ Port St. Lucie	19 7:05 PM DET SS	20 1:05 PM FLA	21 1:05 PM NYM
22 1:10 PM NYM @ Port St. Lucie	23	24 6:05 PM PIT FSS	25 1:05 PM WAS @ Viera	26 1:05 PM TOR	27 1:05 PM DET SS	28 1:05 PM NYY SS
29 1:05 PM DET @ Lakeland	30 1:05 PM BOS FSS	31 7:05 PM HOU @ Kissimmee	1 1:05 PM DET @ Lakeland	2 1:05 PM HOU @ Kissimmee	3 7:00 PM DET Turner Field	4 1:00 PM DET SS Turner Field

TV Networks: FSS/Fox Sports South SS/Sport South *WBC (World Baseball Classic)



ATLANTA BRAVES

Gary Matthews, now a member of the Phillies' broadcast team, played four seasons with the Braves (1977-80), during which he made his only All-Star appearance in 1979 and posted career highs in average (.304), home runs (27) and RBIs (90).



PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES

PRESIDENTIAL PAL

Gary Matthews Is On A Roll As Broadcaster, Author, And Friend Of Obama

BY BRIAN KNAPP

A crowd estimated in the millions flooded the National Mall in Washington D.C. on Jan. 20 to witness the historic inauguration of Barack Obama as the 44th President of the United States. Few had a better seat than former Braves outfielder Gary Matthews.

As a personal friend of the former Illinois senator, he was seated near the podium where Obama took the oath of office and gave his inaugural address. The scene and experience struck Matthews at his core, as millions of Americans of all backgrounds shared their adoration in the foreground.

"It was totally emotional to be part of history," said Matthews, who also was in a small group that toured the White House with Obama. "You look out and see so many people. It was special to be part of something great like that. There are no words to describe it."

In the days before he was sworn in, Obama also invited Matthews to join him on the train ride from Philadelphia to Washington, D.C. – which retraced part of the route taken by Obama's political hero, Abraham Lincoln, to his inauguration in 1861.

"The amazing thing for me was seeing all the people waiting and waving [along the train route]," Matthews said. "We were up and down on the train, but I got to talk with Barack and Michelle. I was in awe that he was on his way to become president. I interviewed Bill Clinton and was in awe of him, but it was different with Barack, because I know him on a personal level."

Matthews met Obama by sheer chance, when their daughters were part of the same dance class in Chicago. Their relationship grew into a friendship through which they played golf and planned cookouts together.

"I'm not one of the guys you see playing basketball with him, but I do get invited to certain things," Matthews said.

Obama's campaign, election and inauguration continued a string of personal successes for Matthews, a color analyst for the Philadelphia Phillies who was part of the team's run to its first World Championship since 1980. Matthews even wrote a book – "Phillies Confidential: The Untold Story of the 2008 Championship Season" ($13.57 at amazon.com) – about his experience covering the Phillies.

"I've had a heck of a year," Matthews said. "This came at a perfect time for me. To be able to live through it again after playing in [the] '83 [NLCS with the Phillies] and beating the Dodgers... for these guys to come out and take it another step further, it was really a tearful moment. I almost kind of felt the way I thought I would had I been a player."

Broadcasting provides daily challenges for the competitive 58-year-old Matthews and also keeps him around the game he grew up playing as a kid in California. He believes the two decades he spent in the major leagues as a player (1972-87) and coach provide him with unique insight inside the booth.

"Guys who played can add a different dimension," Matthews said. "You have guys who've done this for 10 to 15 years or longer but not with the perspective of having gone through and been a part of the fire. I like being challenged to see whether or not I do know the game. It's a tremendous amount of work, if you do it right, and we're not without our harsh critics."

Though he has served as a minor league hitting coordinator for

the Cubs and as a major league hitting instructor for the Blue Jays and Brewers, Matthews has no plans to return to the game in an on-field capacity.

"I'm done," he said. "They got me out of there. It's enjoyable if you're able to do your job. I loved being down there, but everybody wants to be a hitting coach."

Instead, he has designs on expanding his reach with a microphone.

"I'm trying to get to be the best I possibly can and maybe expand to do some of the national stuff," he said.

Matthews has an excellent track record. He spent 16 seasons in the major leagues as an outfielder and designated hitter, compiling 2,011 hits, 234 home runs and a solid .281 batting average. Known for his ability to perform under pressure, "Sarge" – as he was affectionately known – was named Most Valuable Player in the 1983 NLCS. He hit .429 with three homers and eight runs batted in, as the Phillies wiped out the Dodgers in five games. All told, Matthews batted .323 in four career post-season series with the Phillies and Cubs, hitting seven homers and driving in 15 runs in 19 games.

"You'd have to ask pitchers from my era what kind of player I was," Matthews said. "It was a different ballgame when I played. I took pride in trying to hit in the clutch."

Matthews, whose son Gary is an outfielder with the Angels, spent four of his 16 seasons with the Braves after signing with Atlanta as a free agent in 1976. In 588 games with the Braves (1977-80), he batted .288 and averaged 20 home runs, 85 runs scored, 161 hits and 73 RBIs.

"It was a great time," Matthews said. "I played with some great young guys. I wouldn't give that experience up for anything. I loved Atlanta."

The Braves dealt the 1973 National League Rookie of the Year to the Phillies in a trade for pitcher Bob Walk prior to the 1981 season. Matthews helped lead Philadelphia to the 1983 World Series, but the Phillies lost the series in five games.

"I felt every time I was traded that the team that was getting me was going to get the best end of the deal," Matthews said.

Matthews closed his career with the Cubs and Mariners. During Chicago's run to a division title in 1984, he finished fifth in MVP voting, hitting .291 and leading the league with 103 walks, 10 sacrifice flies and a .410 on-base percentage. The memory still haunts Matthews, a married father of five who resides in Chicago with his wife of 13 years, Sandy.

"We all would have become heroes had we gotten it done," he said.

HOW I MADE IT TO THE MAJORS

JONATHAN McCRIGHT
GROUNDS CREW MEMBER

BY STEVE FALL

JONATHAN McCRIGHT spends hours perfecting the fine details of Turner Field's playing surface. That standard of excellence pays off when he sees the final product, and when he hears broadcasters or players compliment the field.

"It's always a great thing to hear when you see an infielder make a great play," said McCright, a member of field director Ed Mangan's grounds crew since 2001. "You see the way the ball responded off the clay or a nice scoop at first base. And you know that earlier that day, you worked on that area to make sure that it was a smooth surface and there weren't any bumps in it."

On game nights during the season, McCright's workday starts around 9 a.m. and concludes with their final cleanup. That might not happen until 10:30 or 11 p.m., even later if a rain delay takes place.

"When they're in town, it could be an 80- or 90-hour work week," said the 26-year-old McCright, a seasonal full-time grounds crew member who works from March through mid-November. "It's long hours. It's a busy summer, but you enjoy it. I love watching baseball, so it makes it all worthwhile."

McCright's main responsibility is the area around home plate. He starts the day by repairing it from the previous game. He puts a natural soil conditioner called Turface on the baselines, home plate and pitcher's mound. He then adds water to make sure the clay stays moist. After he and the other grounds crew members mow the grass in their designated areas, they hand water the infield. Around midday, they have the field ready for baseball. Afternoons get spent fine-tuning and troubleshooting problem areas they might have spotted during the morning. They make sure the field has no inconsistencies.

Born and raised in Atlanta, McCright grew up a big Braves fan. He didn't play baseball, focusing instead on soccer and basketball. In his senior year at Parkview High School in suburban Atlanta, McCright and his neighbor applied for two different jobs - lifeguards and part-time grounds crew members at Turner Field.

"Luckily enough, I was contacted by the Braves before the lifeguard opportunity came along," he said.

McCright attended Clemson University, but worked for the Braves while home for summers. After serving on the grounds crew's part-time game staff from 2001 through 2003, he moved into his current position. He graduated from Clemson in December 2006 with a degree in landscape architecture and a minor in turf grass management.

"In my mind, I see the field as one large working drawing where all the different surfaces – whether it's the infield grass, the outfield grass, the clay areas, the warning track – are all pieces to a landscape puzzle," said McCright. "All those different pieces have the same dimensions every year, but maintenance might vary from year to year, depending on the weather, the forecast for the season, or the wear patterns."

McCright sees the grounds crew as a great experience and opportunity for people who enjoy the game.

"You have to have a passion for horticulture or plants. And you have to be able to apply that passion to athletics," said McCright. "If you can put those two together, I think you can be very successful. But you have to be willing to open your mind to new ideas, techniques and strategies."

ALUMNI NOTES

- **Felipe Alou** (OF/1B, 1966-69) and his family received the **Ray Boone** (1B, 1959-60) Family Award Jan. 17 at the Professional Baseball Scouts Foundation's In the Spirit of the Game dinner in Los Angeles.
- **Andruw Jones** (OF, 1996-2007) signed a minor league contract for $500,000 plus incentives with Texas.
- **Phil Niekro** (RHP, 1964-83, '87) was among celebrities in Jim McMahon's Swang "N" Super Bowl Bash golf tournament Jan. 29-30 at Lakewood Ranch Golf & Country Club in Bradenton, Fla., to benefit charities.
- The National Baseball Hall of Fame celebrated the achievements of African-American players with special programs and activities Feb.16-21 in honor of Black History Month and in anticipation of the April opening of the new exhibit celebrating the life of **Hank Aaron** (OF/1B, 1954-74).
- **Darrell Evans** (3B/1B, 1969-76, '89) will manage the Victoria (British Columbia) Seals in their first season in the independent Golden Baseball League. He also managed the Palm Springs (Calif.) Chill in the Arizona Winter League, a short-season instructional league.
- **Rico Brogna** (1B, 2001) was hired as an assistant football coach at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn. It's his second stint at the school. Most recently, he was a high school football coach and a scout for the Arizona Diamondbacks.
- The Red Sox signed **Mark Kotsay** (OF, 2008) to a one-year contract. He underwent arthroscopic back surgery Jan. 29 to remove a displaced disk fragment, but is not expected to miss much time.
- **Dave Bristol** (Manager, 1976-77) and **Darren Holmes** (RHP, 2002-03) passed on their expertise to players and coaches during the inaugural N.C. Pro Player Baseball Clinic Jan. 24 in Asheville, N.C.
- **Russ Ortiz** (RHP, 2003-04) and **Jose Capellan** (RHP, 2004) signed minor league contracts with Houston.
- **Woody Woodward** (INF, 1963-68) was named a scout by Seattle.
- **Daryle Ward** (1B, 2006) signed a minor league contract with Cincinnati.
- **Odalis Perez** (LHP, 1998-2001) signed a minor league contract with Washington.
- **Joe Torre** (C/1B, 1960-68; Manager 1982-84) has a new book out titled "The Yankee Years" (Doubleday, 512 pp, $14.82 at amazon.com).
- **Jung Bong** (LHP, 2002-03) is with the LG Twins in the Korea Baseball Organization.
- Oakland signed **Russ Springer** (RHP, 1998-99) to a one-year contract.
- **Paul Bako** (C, 2000-01) signed a one-year contract with the Cubs.
- The Mets signed **Matt DeSalvo** (RHP, 2008) to a minor league contract.
- Cleveland signed **George Lombard** (OF, 1998-2001) to a minor league contract.
- **Chad Fox** (RHP, 1997) and **Mike Stanton** (LHP, 1989-95) are among non-roster players invited to spring training by the Cubs.
- **Henry Blanco** (C, 2002-03) signed a one-year contact with the Padres.
- **Lance Cormier** (RHP, 2006-07) signed a one-year contract with Tampa Bay.
- **Matt Belisle** (RHP), the Braves' No. 1 draft pick in 1998 who was non-tendered by Cincinnati, signed a minor league contract with Colorado.
- **Tom Martin** (LHP, 2004-05) signed a minor league contract with the Mets.
- **Corky Miller** (C, 2007-08) signed a minor league contract with the White Sox.

BIRTHDAYS

MARCH

1ST	NICK STRINCEVICH (94)
	JIM PANTHER (64)
	TONY CASTILLO (46)
2ND	DON SCHWALL (73)
	RON GANT (44)
	RAUL MONDESI (38)
3RD	CHUCK CARY (49)
	MATT DIAZ (31)
	JORGE JULIO (30)
4TH	BOB W. JOHNSON (73)
	JEFF DEDMON (49)
	BRIAN HUNTER (41)
	ED GIOVANOLA (40)
	DAVE STEVENS (39)
5TH	DEL CRANDALL (79)
	PHIL ROOF (68)
	MIKE HESSMAN (31)
	FRANCISLEY BUENO (28)
6TH	RICK BEHENNA (49)
7TH	GLEN CLARK (68)
	JEFF BURROUGHS (58)
	ALBERT HALL (51)
8TH	JIM BOUTON (70)
9TH	DARREL CHANEY (61)
	TERRY MULHOLLAND (46)
	C.J. NITKOWSKI (36)
	WAYNE FRANKLIN (35)
	WILLY AYBAR (26)
10TH	KEN MACKENZIE (75)
11TH	STEVE REED (43)
12TH	JIMMY WYNN (67)
	DALE MURPHY (53)
13TH	RAY MARTIN (84)
	GARY KOLB (69)
	MARV STAEHLE (67)
	JORGE FABREGAS (39)
14TH	JERRY WILLARD (49)
15TH	ROBERT FICK (35)
	VLADIMIR NUNEZ (34)
17TH	JIMMIE HALL (71)
	CLARENCE "CITO" GASTON (65)
18TH	PAT JARVIS (68)
	GERONIMO BERROA (44)
	CORKY MILLER (33)
20TH	PAT CORRALES (68)
22ND	GEORGE CROWE (88)
	MATT SINATRO (49)
23RD	JOHNNY LOGAN (83)
	BOBBY DEWS (71)
	MIKE REMLINGER (43)
	TONY PENA (28)
24TH	JOSE CABRERA (37)
	STEVE KARSAY (37)
25TH	JIM BRITTON (65)
	TOM GLAVINE (43)
	HOWARD BATTLE (37)
26TH	JARVIS BROWN (42)
	SHANE REYNOLDS (41)
27TH	WALT LINDEN (85)
	WES COVINGTON (77)
	DICK RUTHVEN (58)
29TH	DENNY MCLAIN (65)
	BRIAN JORDAN (42)
	DAN KOLB (34)
31ST	JOHN HERRNSTEIN (71)
	TOM HAUSMAN (56)

ChopTalk
THE OFFICIAL MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF THE ATLANTA BRAVES

SUBSCRIPTIONS
P.O. Box 80750
Conyers, Ga. 30013-8750
PHONE 1-877-655-CHOP (2467)
WEB Braves.com/choptalk

PUBLISHER
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Wonderdog Publishing, Inc.

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CARTOONIST: Johnny Sajem

PRODUCTION
ART DIRECTOR: Clark Odom

ADVERTISING
SALES:
Scott Rickles 800-929-4098
Dan Tomkiewicz 770-640-1681
FLORIDA SALES
Carmel Modica 850-231-3146

PRINTER
Publisher's Press

SUBSCRIBER SERVICES
McMillen Communications

NEWSSTAND OPERATIONS
Curtis Circulation Company

BUSINESS OPERATIONS
Rob Calcutta

CHANGE OF ADDRESS
Send address changes or corrections to: ChopTalk, P.O. Box 80750, Conyers, Ga. 30013-8750 or call 1-877-655-CHOP (2467) or visit braves.com/choptalk.

OFFICE OF PUBLICATION
12829 Trinity Dr.
Stafford, TX 77477-4214
PHONE 1-877-655-CHOP (2467)
E-MAIL Letters@ChopTalkonline.com

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EDITOR & PUBLISHER

THE ANSWERS

IT'S BEEN A WHILE since we paid a visit to the Answer Man, so with spring training in progress and a very interesting season just around the corner, we thought it would be an appropriate time to check in with the great "seer and sage" to give our readers a preview of what to expect in coming months.

So, wise one, what *do* you expect in coming months?

Answer Man: Many foul balls. You know, it's a long season - a marathon, not a sprint, they say. So, there will be many, many foul balls.

Hmmm, very enlightening. But what about the Braves? You know that's what we want to talk about when we come a knockin'.

A.M.: What about them?

You know! How are they going to do? What players will have great seasons? Any chance of getting back to the playoffs?

A.M.: Whoa! One question at a time. You know the Answer Man charges by the answer.

Okay... Who will be the biggest surprise of the season?

A.M.: Bobby Cox. No ejections.

You can't be serious.

A.M.: The Answer Man is always serious. You've seen my invoices.

Then how can Cox get through the season without being thrown out of a single game?

A.M.: You saw last season, didn't you? He's going to be so content with this new pitching staff and his new knees that he'll finally cut the umps some slack and sit back and enjoy the fun.

What about players? Who will be the biggest surprise among players?

A.M.: The biggest surprise to fans will be Casey Kotchman. By the way, you guys sure have cornered the market on "K's" the last few months - Kotchman and the king of K's, Kenshin Kawakami! The fans didn't get to see the real Kotchman late last year. The fans and the media in Anaheim - that's where the Angels play, not Los Angeles, in case you're confused - already are crying because they didn't get to the World Series, they couldn't sign Mark Teixeira, and now they don't have Kotchman to play first base. Nice score for Frank Wren, you'll see.

Who will be the Braves' MVP?

A.M.: Pay attention! Didn't I just tell you? Frank Wren! You get invoiced twice for that one.

How can the general manager be the MVP?

A.M.: Let me count the ways. Kotchman... Derek Lowe... Kenshin Kawakami... Javier Vazquez... Jair Jurrjens... You're going to like this young Boone Logan guy in the bullpen, too, and Josh Anderson is just what this team has needed in a leadoff man for a long time. Of, yes, and there's the outfielder to be named. Stay tuned.

But this team really needs a power boost.

A.M.: I repeat - are you paying attention? Outfielder to be named. That's only half the story, though. Chipper contributed very little power in the second half last year, mainly because of his sore shoulder. That should be history. And you have five other starters, count 'em - Kotchman, Kelly Johnson, Yunel Escobar, Brian McCann and Jeff Francoeur - who all will hit more home runs than last year. With Chipper, that makes six positions with more homers than a year ago, and with the outfielder to be named, it's seven. As for the eighth, watch that Josh Anderson run. And let's not forget the best bench in a long time. Watch!

The bullpen always worries me though. Won't it be a problem?

A.M.: You are dense, aren't you? What don't you like about Mike Gonzalez, Rafael Soriano and Peter Moylan?

Dare we ask about Tommy Hanson?

A.M.: Shhhh! The Braves don't want to talk about him, but trust me, he'll do his own talking.

Any big mid-season acquisition likely?

A.M.: Two words - Tim Hudson.

Okay, Answer Man. Sounds exciting. Anything else?

A.M.: The invoice is in the mail.

Thanks... No wonder we don't call you more often.

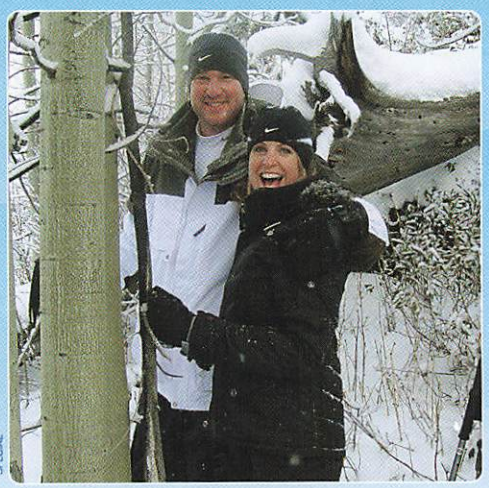
Those of you with computers, please sign up for the ChopTalk Readers group on Facebook.com. It's a great way for us to keep in touch with you, and vice versa. You can post your thoughts and comments about the Braves, too.

THIS ISSUE OF CHOPTALK was mailed Feb. 19. The April issue will be mailed Mar. 19.

BEYOND BASEBALL

BY **PATTY RASMUSSEN**

Derek Lowe and his bride, Carolyn, romp in the snow on their honeymoon to Jackson Hole, Wyoming.



SPECIAL

Wedding Bells

IT WAS A BUSY off-season for **Derek Lowe**, who signed with a new team and also got married! Lowe and his wife, **Carolyn**, were wed on Dec. 13, in Lowe's hometown of Dearborn, Michigan. The wedding was attended by 130 guests, all family and close friends, and was held in historic Lovett Hall, a 1930s era ballroom built by **Henry Ford**. The ceremony tent was decorated to look like a winter wonderland, and the reception ballroom had a Christmas/holiday theme. Since the couple makes their off-season home in Florida, they decided to go somewhere completely opposite for their honeymoon, thus spending a week at the Amangani Resort in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. They spent much of their time outdoors snowshoeing, dog-sledding, snow-mobiling and taking romantic sleigh rides.

BRIAN AND ASHLEY McCANN traveled to two extremes this off-season. First, they joined Ashley's family on a ski trip in early January to Lake Tahoe, on the border of California and Nevada. Though the couple didn't ski, they had a great time relaxing with the family in the gorgeous Sierra Nevada Mountains. In late January, the McCanns joined former Braves **Andruw** and **Nicole Jones** and **Mark** and **Heidi DeRosa** for a couples-only trip to Atlantis in the Bahamas...

Kim Hudson will once again lead a team of walkers for the Annual Make a Wish Foundation Walk for Wishes on April 25 at Atlantic Station in Midtown Atlanta. Many of Kim's friends from Peachtree City, as well as Braves wives, join in the annual walk that raises money to pay for wishes of critically ill children. Kim is now a board member of the Make A Wish Foundation of Alabama and Georgia and plans to be even more involved with the organization...

Speaking of the Braves wives, last year the group helped raise funds to support Camp Erin, a bereavement camp for children and teens founded by the Moyer Foundation, begun by Phillies pitcher **Jamie Moyer** and his wife, **Karen**. With help from the Atlanta Braves wives, the first Camp Erin will be held in Hampton, Ga., just south of Atlanta, April 24-26. The camp can accommodate between 50 to 100 children. The Braves wives group plans to visit the camp at some point during the coming season...

After Braves organizational meetings and his knee surgery, **Bobby Cox** and his wife, **Pam**, also managed to get in a little vacation time this off-season. The couple traveled to Cancun and Cozumel, Mexico, on Jan. 23 for seven days of sunshine and relaxation. "I had a great time," said Cox. "I always have to be pushed into going, but once I get there, I have a great time. I love visiting Mexico, because it's away without having to travel too far. Just a two-hour flight, and you're away from it all."...

Bench coach **Chino Cadahia**, his wife, **Lynn**, their daughter, **Lauren**, and Braves strength and conditioning coach, **Phil Falco**, took in an Atlanta Thrashers NHL game on Jan. 29, at Philips Arena. They managed to have a good night even though the Thrashers lost. "We went to a couple of games last season

EARLY SPRING

TOM (above) **AND CHRIS GLAVINE** served as hosts for the 16th Annual Tom Glavine's Spring Training event to benefit the Georgia Transplant Foundation. The game night themed evening was held Feb. 6 at the Georgia Aquarium in downtown Atlanta and gave guests the opportunity to pit their skills against professional athletes in pool, blackjack, ping pong, and other games. In attendance were **Tim Hudson** and his wife, **Kim**, **Kelly** and **Lauren Johnson**, **Jeff Francoeur**, former Braves **John Smoltz**, **Mark DeRosa**, **Andruw Jones** and his wife, **Nicole**, and **Pete Smith**. In addition to games, the event featured extensive silent and live auctions.

BEST OF ATLANTA

THE ATLANTA Sports Council honored three Atlanta Braves organizational icons at their 2009 Atlanta Sports Awards Gala on Feb. 2. Former owner **Ted Turner** was named the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award, and broadcasters **Pete Van Wieren** and the late **Skip Caray** were honored as co-winners of the **Furman Bisher** Award for Sports Media Excellence. Van Wieren was on hand to pick up his award, named for long-time Atlanta Journal-Constitution sports columnist Furman Bisher. Caray's widow, **Paula**, accepted on behalf of her husband. Hall of Famer **Phil Niekro** accepted the Lifetime Achievement Award on behalf of Turner, who was unable to attend. Van Wieren was accompanied by his wife, **Elaine**. Also in attendance were Niekro's wife, **Nancy**, the Carays' daughter **Shayelyn Woodbery**, accompanied by her husband **David**, and the Carays' son, **Josh Caray**, as well as former Braves outfielders turned broadcasters **Ron Gant** and **Brian Jordan**, and a host of other Atlanta area sports stars from every level of competition from high school to professional. Emmy award winning **Ernie Johnson Jr.**, served as emcee of the event held in the Egyptian Ballroom at the Fox Theater in downtown Atlanta. **Chipper Jones** was a nominee for Professional Athlete of the Year, and **Tim Hudson** was a nominee for Sports Person of the Year.

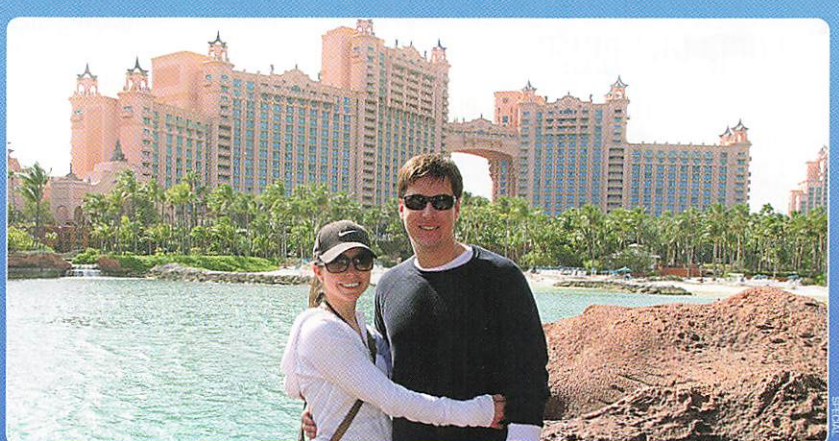
Paula Caray and Pete Van Wieren at the Atlanta Sports Awards Gala.

and really had a good time," said Lynn, who said they planned to catch at least one more game before heading to spring training. "Our friend **Ray Bear**, who used to be in the Braves organization, is now the Thrashers' strength and conditioning coach," she added. "We got to visit with him a little bit during the game."...

Reliever **Jeff Ridgway** was in pretty heady company when he joined Hall of Fame pitcher and former Brave (1981) **Gaylord Perry** as a guest speaker at the 5th Annual Hot Stove Banquet and Silent Auction, Jan. 30, at The Citadel's Mark Clark Hall, near Charleston, S.C. Ridgway, a Washington state native who now lives in Charleston, was accompanied by his wife, **Kelli**. Ridgway was a member of the Charleston RiverDogs, then a Tampa Bay affiliate, during the 2001 and 2003 seasons. Perry is a 1991 inductee into the Baseball Hall of Fame, won 314 games, was a five-time All-Star, and was the first pitcher to win the Cy Young Award in each league (1972 with the Indians and 1978 with the Padres). The banquet is a joint venture between the Charleston RiverDogs and The Citadel to prepare Charleston area baseball fans for the upcoming season. In addition to the banquet, a silent auction was held with proceeds going to Medical University of South Carolina's Storm Eye Institute, the RiverDogs' primary charity, and The Citadel Foundation for scholarships...

Tom Glavine, television star? Glavine plays himself in a cameo role during the first season of "High Rise," playing the client of agent and attorney **Austin Prescott**, portrayed by series creator, **Steve Barnes**. High Rise is a serialized drama centered on the lives of several Atlantans who live and work at Terminus, an actual mixed-use development located in the Buckhead section of Atlanta. The program debuts Mar. 31 on Comcast Channel 1, in Atlanta, and online at HighRiseTheSeries.com. Glavine will appear during the April 17 show (episode 6)...

Ronda Smith, wife of former Braves pitcher **Pete Smith**, has launched a new line of jewelry that can be found in Red Twig, a boutique in Alpharetta co-owned by **Chris Glavine**, and Uptown Girl, the Duluth-area boutique owned by **Ashley McCann**. The unique custom jewelry includes necklaces, bracelets, and earrings crafted with natural gemstones, Swarovski crystals and antique accent pieces. Check it out online at rondasmithdesigns.com.



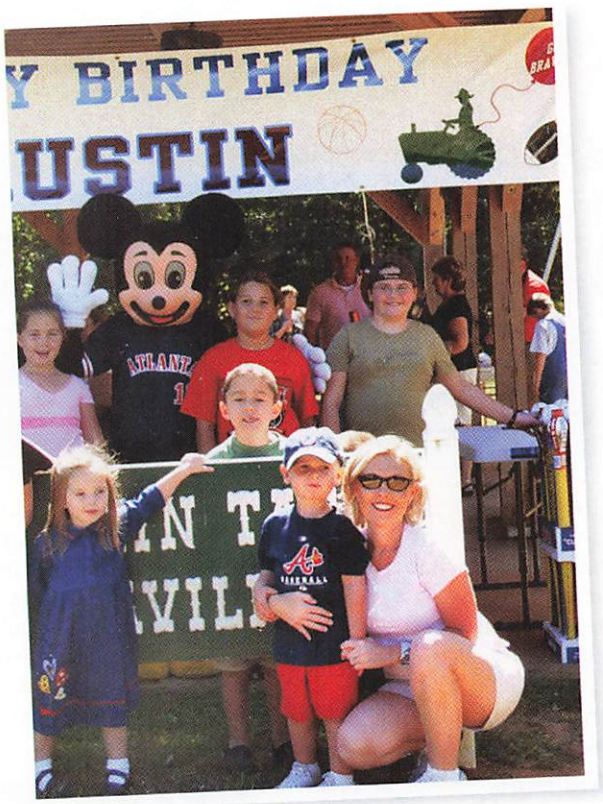
ATLANTIS FOUND

KELLY JOHNSON and his wife, **Lauren**, celebrated their first wedding anniversary Jan. 26 with a trip to Atlantis in the Bahamas. "It was more of a relaxing, be out in the sun trip for us," said Lauren. The first day of the trip was cool, so the couple spent most of the day walking around the property, checking out the wildlife exhibits. Once the temperatures warmed up, the Johnsons enjoyed the water slides, lazy river tubing, and swimming with dolphins. "We got to play with a mom and baby dolphin," said Lauren. "The handlers were training the younger one to work with people."

TALKIN' CHOP

LETTERS & PHOTOS FROM OUR READERS

WHETHER YOU'RE HAVING FUN AT TURNER FIELD, EXPERIENCING A CLOSE ENCOUNTER WITH YOUR FAVORITE BRAVES PLAYER, OR JUST SHOWING OFF YOUR COLLECTION OF BRAVES STUFF OR TRYING ON YOUR NEW BRAVES SHIRT, WE WANT TO HEAR ABOUT IT AND SEE A PICTURE.



SPECIAL GUEST

Austin Simmons, my grandson, celebrated his third birthday with more than 75 people at a party held at Sell's Mill Park in Hoschton, Ga. Austin is standing next to his mom, Nicole Simmons. Mickey Mouse, wearing his Braves jersey, was Austin's special guest to help with the celebration.

JACKIE SIMS
Winder, Ga.

TRUE BELIEVERS

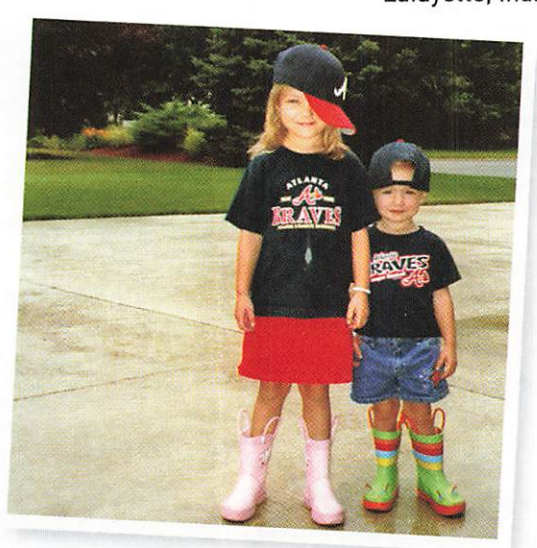
We still believe in the Braves and watch each game with great pride. Our dog, Cassie, loves the Braves, too. Her favorite commercial is the one for Delta with Jeff Francoeur. She wants to know if he has a bucket of baseballs for the U.S. If so, could he hit one to Bostic, N.C.?

JOHNNY, DENISE AND CASSIE DOWNS
Bostic, N.C.

TREND SETTERS

It's a rainy July day in Indiana, but that doesn't keep our granddaughters, Jaden (5) and Kori (2), from displaying their team spirit by wearing their Braves shirts and caps. Okay, so the funky rain boots don't exactly go with the theme, but the girls are having fun. Go Braves!

JOHN & CAROL BURKE
Lafayette, Ind.



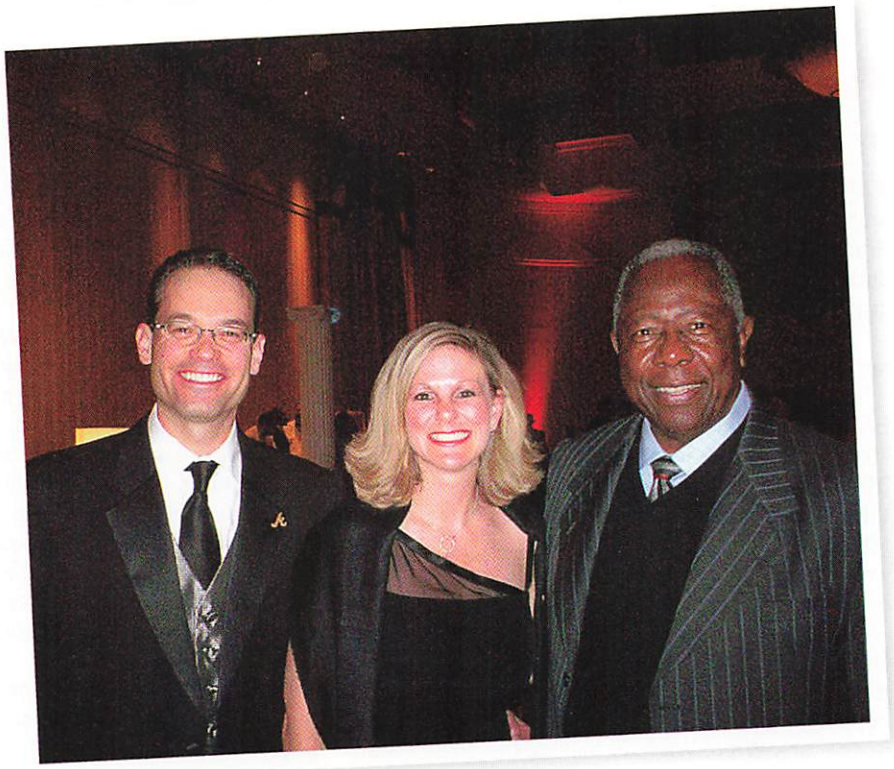
PUMPKIN POWER

This is my Halloween pumpkin that I do every year. By the end of October, I am missing the Braves so much that I have to do something. The children in the neighborhood, and some of the adults, always comment on it when they come to Trick or Treat.

MARY LOU BROOKS
Dunwoody, Ga.

CHOPTALK AND THE ATLANTA BRAVES SUPPORT OUR TROOPS

GRAND SLAM WEEKEND



We really had a nice time in Atlanta going to Diamond Gala and AutographFest. They were definitely worth attending. Among other things, we met Patty Rasmussen from ChopTalk and enjoyed visiting with her very much. The highlight at the Diamond Gala was meeting Hank Aaron (R). We had a chance to visit with him, and Regan played blackjack with him for about 30 minutes. We took this picture that's now proudly displayed in our den. The other highlight was spending time with Frank Wren. He was very open about the team, and we shared a lot of laughs. He even taught me a few things about the waiver process. AutographFest was well organized, and the fans seemed very pleased. We ended up with (autographs from) everyone except Roger McDowell and Phil Niekro. I took a chance and had Tommy Hanson and Jason Heyward sign a bat together. Imagine how valuable that could be if things go according to plan. We walked around the stadium before leaving and found our brick by the Hank Aaron statue. We also saw John Schuerholz, (CEO) Terry McGuirk and (assistant GM) Bruce Manno, who all seemed very appreciative of us coming from Southwest Florida. We certainly made the most of the trip!

RYAN & REGAN GOLDBERG

Bonita Springs, Fla.

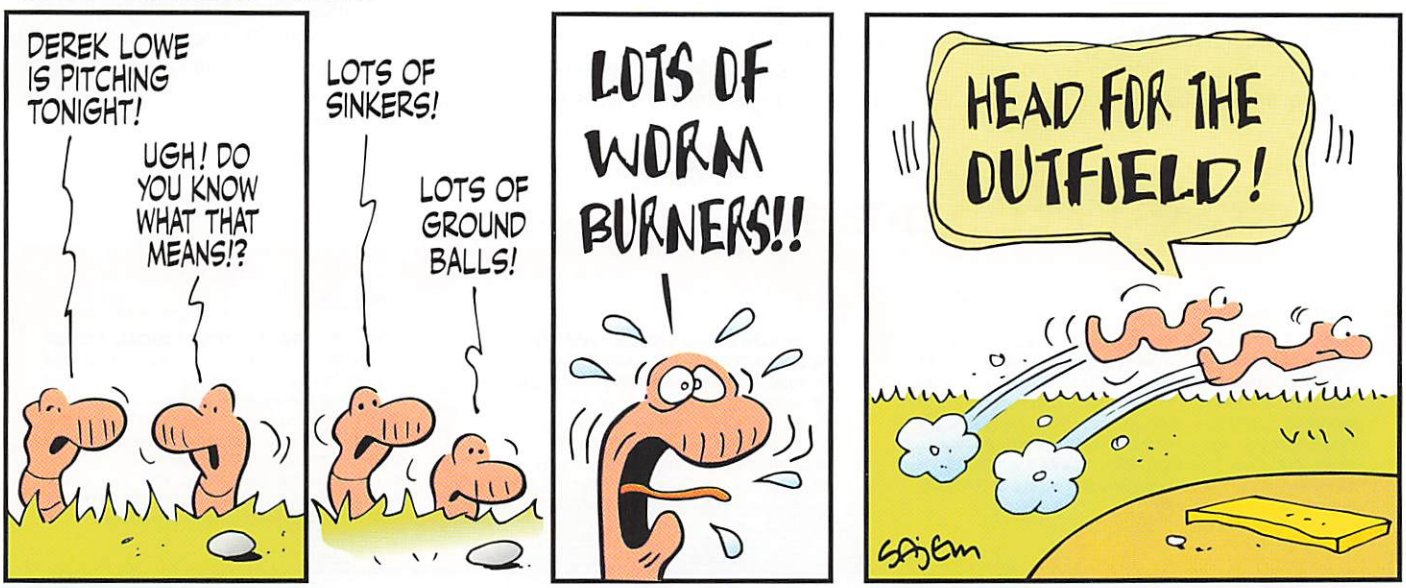
Editor's Note: Readers may recognize the Goldbergs from last summer's subscription ad that featured them leaving for their honeymoon with ChopTalk in hand.

YOUR PICTURES

We **really** look forward to receiving your photos that show your Braves spirit. Please keep in mind, however, that for publication purposes, **photos sent by e-mail must be "high-resolution" images**. Check the setting on the side of your digital camera and adjust it to create the largest possible files. Also keep in mind that **photos taken with a camera phone cannot reproduce well enough to meet our publication standards. We cannot use computer printouts either**.

Please continue to send us your photos! But please be sure to send high-resolution images by e-mail to **letters@choptalkonline.com**, or hard-copy snapshots that are professionally printed via regular mail to **Talkin' Chop, P.O. Box 80750, Conyers, Ga. 30013-8750**.

THE WORMS TURN



A RIDE ON THE CARAVAN

BY PATTY RASMUSSEN

IMMEDIATELY AFTER top pitching prospect Tommy Hanson stepped off the Braves Caravan bus in Macon, he introduced himself to a fan waiting for the autograph session to begin.

"Tommy Hanson!" crowed the delighted fan. "The future!"

That was just the type of response the Braves were hoping for on the first stop of six caravan trips made the week of Jan. 27-31 to spread good will and excitement for the coming season. The caravans visited Macon, Athens, and Augusta, Georgia, as well as Birmingham and Auburn, Alabama, and Spartanburg, South Carolina.

Personnel on the Macon trip included Hanson, Brian McCann, Blaine Boyer, former Braves reliever Brad Clontz, hitting coach Terry Pendleton, and general manager Frank Wren. While in Macon, the six men visited patients at the Children's Hospital at the Medical Center of Central Georgia, and then made another stop at Academy Sports + Outdoors for an autograph session.

The players, along with members of the Atlanta media and Braves community relations and public relations staff, met at the players' parking lot at Turner Field at noon and boarded a comfortable bus for the 90-minute drive south to Macon. Most of the way, players either talked to each other, checked messages on their phones, or, in the case of McCann, got a quick nap.

Arriving in downtown Macon, the players donned Braves jerseys and began making the rounds through the wards and rooms of the pediatric hospital, signing autographs and posing for pictures.

In one room, McCann played a couple of innings of Wii baseball with a 10-year-old patient named Jonathan. McCann managed to get a home run, but struck out in his next at-bat!

The players then visited a young girl who had just been diagnosed with cancer who literally bounced for joy on the hospital bed when the Braves walked into the room.

Finally, they made a surprise visit to a non-pediatric patient, 18-year-old Matt Gosman, who was seriously injured in a car accident in December. Gosman only knew that he would have a special visit and was rendered almost speechless as the players walked around the corner to where he was waiting.

"Brian McCann," said Gosman, stunned, naming the people he knew by sight. "Blaine Boyer, Terry Pendleton, Frank Wren."

The players chatted with Gosman, encouraged him to work hard to get well, and promised to see him when he came to a Braves game at Turner Field.

After the hospital visit, the group climbed back in the bus for the drive to Academy Sports + Outdoor where Hanson received his hearty welcome. Waiting for members of the Macon media in a small conference room, the players dug into Subway sandwiches and chatted, while Wren browsed through the store.

After interviews with local media, the players went to the front of the store where over 300 people were lined up, patiently waiting to greet them, and to get an autograph or a photo. Nine-year-old Paolo Francisco, a huge Chipper Jones fan and ChopTalk subscriber had the foresight to bring along the January issue of the magazine for Wren, who's on the cover, to autograph. After 90 minutes of autographs and interaction, the players boarded the bus for the drive back to Atlanta.

PATTY RASMUSSEN

Braves personnel (clockwise from top/left) Brian McCann, Blaine Boyer, Frank Wren, Tommy Hanson, Terry Pendleton and Brad Clontz visit hospital patient Matt Gosman during the caravan stop in Macon.

On the return ride, McCann and Hanson talked quietly about the upcoming season and what to expect at spring training. Between bus rides, walking, waiting, posing for pictures, and signing autographs, it was a long day. But it was deemed a success by McCann as the bus pulled back into the players' parking lot.

"Two things: The smile on that girl's face when we walked in her room, and talking to Matt (Gosman)," he said. "That made the day."

FAN CLUBS

BRAVES 400 CLUB

BRAVES 400 CLUB The Braves 400 Club is the official fan club of the Atlanta Braves. It is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting baseball at all levels. Annual membership is $25 and includes a newsletter and the opportunity to participate in activities such as road trips, luncheons, the annual banquet, and charitable events. Send payment to: Braves 400 Club, P.O. Box 7689, Atlanta, Ga. 30309. For more information, call the organization's hotline at (770) 416-4539 or visit braves400.org.

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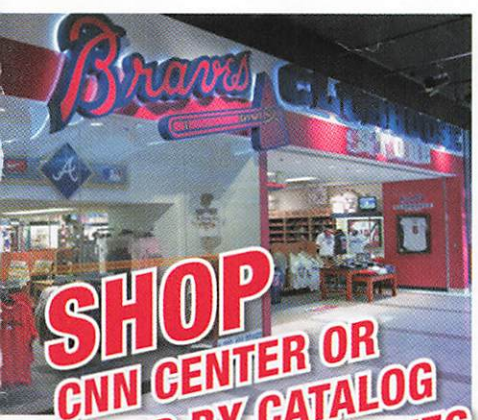

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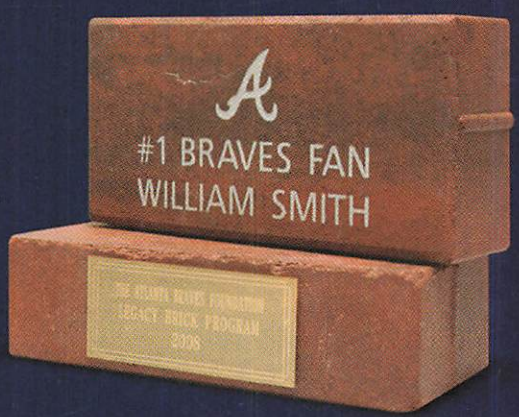

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